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OR,

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BY

G. A. COLMACHE,

Author of

"AN UNDISCOVERED CRIME," ETC.

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O'er whose weird chronicler the brightest flash
Of man's intelligence throws shade instead of light.
Each subtle effort of his boasted science
REVAILING not *revealing* their dread mystery."

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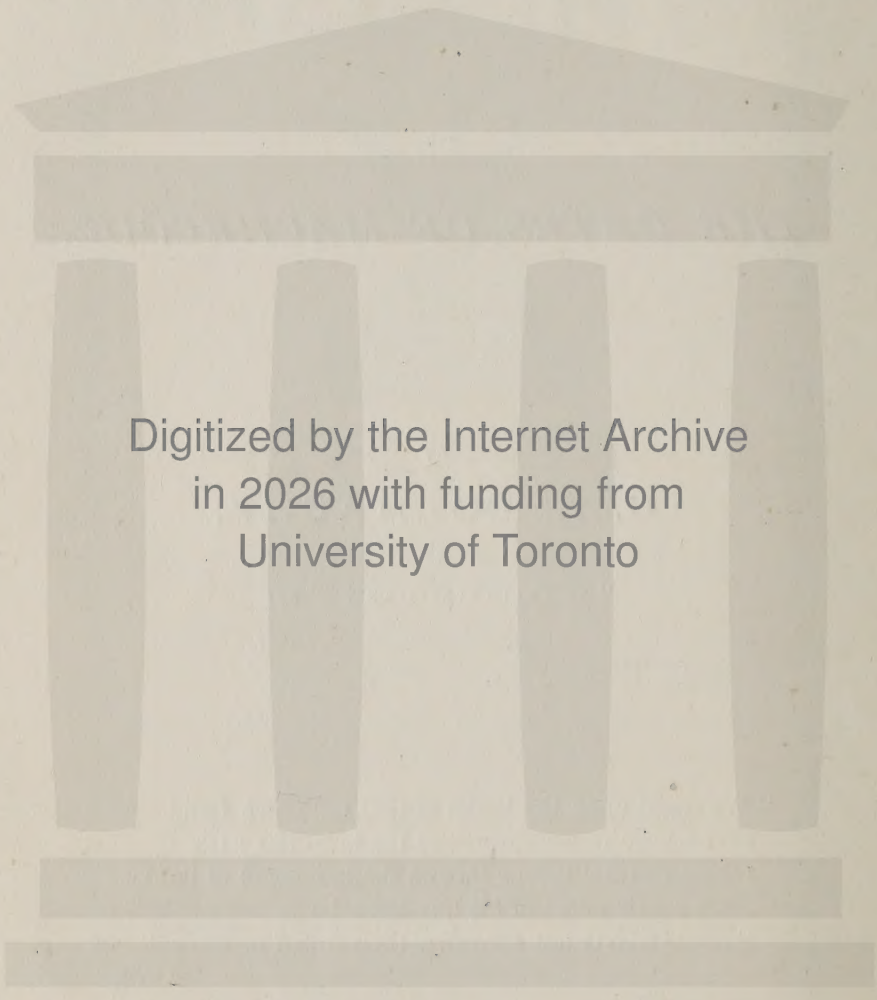

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UNDER SPELL OF THE DARK POWERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT IRON GATES OF MACHECOUL.

THANK Heaven, the great iron gates are gone at last! And now I can open the north window of my chamber without the fear of beholding them. Bill Feargus has just told me that passing by in his fish-cart he saw them being carried away—sold as rusty iron to old Stiff, the marine store-dealer on the wharf at Blatchford. To think, now, that "such a magnificent work of art"—such a "unique production of the blacksmith's craft of the middle ages" (by such designations would my master describe them to the antiquaries who visited Graywood Abbey for the express purpose of inspecting them), should have come to such an end as this! . . . Well, after all, their history is but a type of the fortunes of Graywood itself, where all has gone to ruin and decay; all gone to the great marine store kept by Old Father Time, the great rag-and-bone shop of the past, to be broken up, transformed, and forgotten by all but—myself.

My master bequeathed me a competency, and permission to remain in the old abbey till the heir comes into possession. And as the property has been thrown into Chancery, it is not likely I shall ever be disturbed.

Time flies so quickly by, that sometimes one can

hardly tell whether a vivid impression made upon the mind by a striking event in life, took place long years ago, or but yesterday. Some incidents are stupefying in their effect, deadening the intelligence and the memory; others, again, rouse the brain to such terrible activity, that it would seem as if the details were ever present to remembrance. Thus, amid all the dulness and the silence through which I have been living of late years, I often imagine myself to be still playing my part in the dreadful tragedy which suddenly transformed this once peaceful household into the abode of misery and despair.

There are people, even of the greatest learning, who are impressed with a conviction of the influence of inanimate things over the animate world, and I shall believe to my dying day that the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul were possessed of a fiendish power antagonistic to mankind, and that they really were the work of Satan, as the legend of Machecoul had taught us to regard them. Of all the individuals connected with the noble House of Worledge, I alone survive to tell how these gates were brought to Graywood Abbey from Machecoul in Brittany, packed almost in cotton, for every tendril of the grape-vine which spread its leaves and fruit and stalks in seemingly wild confusion over the rails was wrapped in tow, and bound with canvas cloth, to save it from snapping by the mere shock of removal, so delicate was the metal, so tender was Sir Walter's care of what he scrupled not to own was more precious in his sight than the domain of Graywood itself, with its homesteads, and harvest-fields, and woods, and villages, which extended as far as Blatchford on one side and Hoveton Manor on the other.

I call myself a French valet, but I am not, strictly speaking, a Frenchman. My father, it is true, belonged to the gallant Gallic nation, but his better-half was English to the backbone; and she inspired me with that exaggerated preference for England which the love of opposition always engenders in the mind of an English wife of a French husband. To my father I

owed nothing, save my knowledge of the French tongue, which ought to have been a blessing, but which has proved the great misfortune of my life, as it has been the cause of all the misery I have endured. Was it not this accomplishment which obtained for me the situation of head valet, or rather confidential factotum, to Sir Walter Worledge of Graywood Abbey, to whom after a certain period I became, as he was wont to say, "not by any means an agreeable *resource*, but a hard, strict, and absolute *necessity*."

Sir Walter could scarcely be called a proficient in the art of complimenting, but to me he was always rather more frank than was pleasant, in his appreciation of my qualities. He was the greatest antiquary and archæologist at that time in England; and I verily believe that the constant habit of looking into the past with half-closed, scrutinizing eyes, had completely deadened his senses to the present. I have seen Sir Walter Worledge of Graywood Abbey—a gentleman himself, and come of a race of gentlemen—sit down contented to a fish boiled to rags, a burnt mutton chop, and a cold potato, such as would have caused a mutiny in the household had they been served at the table of the servants' hall. But Sir Walter always remained unconscious of the disaster. With an open volume by his side, he devoured unconsciously whatever was set before him; and while sometimes I was blushing at the display, he would look up at me with a smile, and observe how good it was, how well composed and beautifully executed—meaning, however, the book and not the dinner.

There was but one occasion on which Sir Walter gave way to any lurking pride in the good cheer to be supplied at the Abbey, and this was when the Archæological Society of the county favoured us with a visit. This annual festivity was the one great epoch in Sir Walter's life. The "Society" would come rumbling, jogging, or rattling, according to the nature of the vehicles placed at the disposal of the members by the landlord of the Rose Inn, along the road which leads

to the park gates. Master used to take these visits with the greatest gravity, while we in the servants hall were wont to indulge in the most uproarious hilarity. Never were seen collected together such a set of guys. Such hats, such queer-cut coats among the gentlemen, such bonnets and such scanty skirts among the ladies! To be sure they were one and all of antiquity as awful as the mouldy curiosities they came to see. Their united ages would have ascended to the Deluge. The only faculty they seemed to have preserved in all its youthful vigour was appetite, which would have done honour to a lot of school children at their holiday feast. And I had frequent opportunities of observing that, however much they preferred the antique to any effort of modern art, they liked their fare of the freshest: the eggs could never be too recently laid, the fish too lately caught, and as to the pastry, of which they devoured vast quantities, it must actually be served hot out of the oven.

Sir Walter's household was presided over by his cousin, the Honourable Priscilla Jarvis; for he was old-fashioned enough to imagine that an elderly batchelor's establishment could not be respectable without female aid. The Honourable Miss Jarvis was a tall, thin, elderly spinster, sour as a crab. It was evident to all the household that she entertained sweet hopes of a marriage with her cousin, and her efforts to contain her temper when he was by, used to amuse the attendants at table vastly. In the servants' hall we used to say, however, that she presumed rather too much upon Sir Walter's love of the antique. I once overheard Tom Higgins, the stable-boy, who was the wag of the yard, designate her as the "Horrible Miss Varjus"—a name which made the grooms laugh heartily, but which not one of them contradicted. I gave the boy a cuff for his impudence and twopence for his joke, which I did not think a bad one for a beginner.

The last visit of the Society to Graywood Abbey is chronicled as the most memorable event of my whole existence. On that day began the misfortunes by which

it has been clouded ever since. All the time that I was superintending the service of the dinner-table (for it was beneath my dignity to wait upon the guests), I observed an unusual flutter and stir among the antiquated company. The conversation was carried on in an awestruck whisper, and, from what I could gather in the intervals of my hurried pacing to and fro, it was all about a pair of iron gates! A singular subject enough to engross the attention of such a learned body; but then Sir Walter had lately taken to collecting the oldest specimens of locks and bolts and rusty keys that could be found, giving the most exorbitant price for old rusty nails, provided they were old enough. So that the eagerness with which they discussed the wonderful antiquity and beauty of these seemingly incomparable gates did not so much surprise me. When the company assembled in the drawing-room, the enthusiasm upon this same subject rose to the highest pitch. The large round table in the centre was covered with drawings and sections of the gates, handed from one guest to another with such expedition that in one or two cases the coffee was spilt, and the tea left to drip upon the carpet, which vexed me to such extent that I wished the iron gates—well, no matter where—I understood them to be already in France, and my mother would have said that it was all the same. Now these gates must already have begun to work their evil influence upon my destiny, or else why should I have leaned over the shoulders of one of the most enthusiastic amongst the admirers in order to catch a glimpse of the sketches at which he was gazing? And why should I have re-echoed, almost aloud, his expressions of admiration at the wondrous execution of the designs? And, above all, why on earth should the name of the designer, spelt out by the old antiquary, fix itself in my memory, sticking to it like a burr never to be shaken off, never to be forgotten?—"*The Great Iron Gates of Machecoul, the work of Nicolas Biscornet—Marcel Moreau del.*" There it still remains.

I observed, amid the excitement, that Miss Priscilla, who was something like a crane, and who always walked upon tiptoe with a jerky step, and an eyeglass fixed in her eye, was amongst the most busy in handing about these sections and designs. With juvenile charm and alacrity she even knelt down and spread them out on Sir Walter's knee, while the female portion of the "Society"—by whom, in spite of her five and forty summers, she was still regarded as an innocent juvenile—were quite moved by the sweet grace of her attitude and her playful demeanour. For the first time in my life I was struck by the resemblance between the pair: Sir Walter, with hooked nose, thin lips, and round eyes, was the eagle—rapacious and eager after prey, but scorning to seek it amidst offal; while Miss Priscilla, with nose more hooked, lips more compressed and thinner still, and eyes rounder, more staring, and more hard, because unshaded by the brows, which gave softness to those of Sir Walter, looked like the wicked hawk, ready to seize upon any prey that offered.

The company departed, and then, after Sir Walter and Miss Priscilla had whispered together for some minutes, I was summoned by my master to attend him to his room. To my surprise, he bade me bring with me the plans and sketches of the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul which had occupied the company the whole of that evening; and even when he was seated in his great arm-chair by the fire, he bade me hold them up to the light for more scrutiny and greater admiration. As I assisted him to undress, I could not help observing that he was more bright and brisk than I had ever beheld him. He was a little man, very thin and very wiry, and he absolutely frisked across the room like a school-boy; and when I stooped low to untie his garters, he positively made such playful motion of his foot towards me that it threw me off my balance, and sent me sprawling on the floor! I was quite alarmed at this proof of affability and condescension on his part—for in general he was rather cross and peevish on going to bed—but thought it might be owing to a slight

excess in the matter of that glorious old port from the "King and Constitution" bin—the choicest in the cellar, and amongst all the rare and precious articles contained in the Abbey was to my thinking the rarest and most precious of them all.

At last the secret of this change of mood burst forth. It fell like a thunderbolt upon my head, upon my heart, upon my understanding; in short, it seemed to envelop my whole person with astonishment when, having helped Sir Walter into bed, and taken the milk posset from the hob, where it was always left to simmer till required, he said to me, looking up from the cup after he had taken his first sip, "Lafleur"—this was not my real name, of course, but Sir Walter thought it sounded ancient and *rococo*, and so had adopted it on my first entering his service—"Lafleur, what do you think? I have made up my mind to start immediately—to-morrow if I can—for France!" I was so astounded that I let fall the 'postle spoon I held, with the Cellini sugar-basin and all, upon the carpet. At any other time the awkwardness would have thrown Sir Walter into convulsions, for the solitary studious life he led had weakened his nerves; but at the moment he did not even heed the shock, so excited was he with some merry thought just then passing through his brain. At last, unable to contain the secret any longer, he exclaimed, in a voice almost choked with emotion, "Oh, Lafleur! Can you believe it? The Great Iron Gates of Machecoul are in the market! To think that I should live to see this day! There is not a member of the Society who would not make the greatest sacrifice to become the purchaser of the inestimable treasure—the greatest known to the antiquarian world." As he spoke, he clutched the bed-clothes in a fevered grasp, gathering them up and hugging them as though he held the treasure of which he spoke, in his embrace; in short, behaved like a madman, which I verily believed he was. He kept me up till the small hours of the night. I had to fetch all the "Guides to," the "Pictures of," the "Rambles through," contained in

the library—to compute distances, to measure time, to calculate expenses, before he would allow me to retire; but I bore the fatigue cheerfully, for I felt sure that the whim would be completely forgotten by the morning, and before I fell asleep I thanked the Lord most fervently that I was not like unto one of these rich men, who could never rest content with the ease and comfort of their lot, but must always be hankering after something or other which belonged to somebody else. "Iron gates indeed!—there are iron gates already more than enough all round about the Abbey. If these, now, were of silver, he might have them melted into bells for the fool's-cap he ought to wear." And with this reflection I drew the blanket over my ears and fell asleep.

But I was not long allowed to enjoy repose. At an early hour did Sir Walter's bell begin to tingle with a fury which made me jump up full of alarm, and hurry to his chamber in dread of finding him in a fit of the cramps, to which he was subject after over-indulgence in the choice old port of the "King and Constitution" bin. But I was surprised to find him up already, more than half dressed, and in a state of fuss and excitement difficult to describe. He was impatient as a child, and evidently bent on starting for the Continent that very day, as he had expressed his intention the evening before. How he did bustle and hurry me that day, to be sure! He would not allow me a minute's grace, not even to see to the shirt-frills and plaited cuffs, which I feared would run short if our stay abroad chanced to be over long. Had I but encouraged the idea, I feel sure that, so great was his impatience, so overpowering his fear lest any other member of the Society should arrive at Machecoul before him, he would set out on the journey even before breakfast; but I managed to prolong the packing until the afternoon, and so had leisure to make arrangements more compatible with my master's dignity and my own. Miss Priscilla was left in charge of the household during our absence. If she felt displeasure at the absurdity of this sudden journey she did not show it, but rather

pretended satisfaction, on the plea that Cousin Walter would surely come back from France more than ever pleased with the grace and modesty and good style of his own country-women, after having associated with those impudent French hussies—not one of whom, thank God, she had ever known, but of whom she had heard such shocking things. At five o'clock that afternoon we started from Graywood Abbey, and were far away on our road to Dover before night set in

CHAPTER II.

THE SUPPER—THE BEAUTIFUL GUEST AT MACHECOUL.

MACHECOUL, as you know, is in the heart of Brittany, and the journey thither in those days was long and tedious. But nothing would daunt the spirit of Sir Walter Worledge when in pursuit of some choice morsel of antiquity. Now and then he would betray irritation of mind almost amounting to despair whenever we passed rapidly by any heap of mouldering stones or specimens of ruined antiquity on the road, but upon the whole he behaved better than I had expected. We arrived at Machecoul late in the evening of the fourth day of our journey. Our arrival had been announced, and we found the carriage "*la voiture de Monsieur le Baron*" waiting to receive us. I have been astonished at many things during my life, but I never *was* more astonished than when I beheld the vehicle, into which two men, with long hair flowing over their shoulders, broad-brimmed hats with a penny picture of the Virgin Mary stuck up in front, goatskin vests and baggy breeches, with leather gaiters and thong sandals, were heaping straw for our comfort. "Can this be the livery of the noble house of Machecoul?" thought I, as I surveyed the two wild-looking retainers. "If this fellow now speaking to Sir Walter had but a parrot

on his shoulder, and an umbrella instead of that great knotted whip in his hand, he would be the exact representative of Robinson Crusoe." The *voiture de Monsieur le Baron*—which had been sent to fetch us from the town of Laval to the chateau in consequence of the impracticable roads, which compelled us to leave our carriage at the *Marteau d'or* and proceed to Machecoul in the one so kindly despatched for our journey thither—was an old rumbling cabriolet, standing high on two enormous wheels. It was capped by a great leathern hood, and drawn by two shapeless animals which in England would have been shown at the country fairs as specimens of the hippopotamus, but which in Brittany go by the misapplied name of horses. We were driven in this equipage for seven miles through ruts and stumpy roads, until our bones were nearly shaken from our bodies. Every now and then we were thrown backwards with our legs high up in the air, then forwards with our noses low down on the back of the driver, who sat on the edge of the splash-board in front of us, his baggy breeches of home-spun canvas swelling out with the wind, and his wooden shoes rattling against the iron. Strange for a gentleman accustomed to every luxury in life, my master seemed to like all this! He said it was all antique fashion. I should think it was! Fortunately, however, if the conveyance was antique, so was the road likewise, and I could very soon understand the reason of the broad wheels and the clumsy horses. The familiarity, too, of the shaggy sheepskinned coachman was something quite sickening to me. I, who had lived nearly twenty years with Sir Walter, would never have dared to have spoken to him a word concerning my family and prospects. But before we had driven a mile this man had informed him of the temper of his wife, the number of his children, and then of the wages he received and the skill with which he contrived to hide them from the partner of his joys and sorrows. This very likely was antique fashion too, for master did not tell him to hold his tongue, which he certainly would have bidden

me to do, and very sharply too, had *I* ever ventured to take the same liberty.

We arrived at Machecoul just as the moon was rising. I was quite depressed at finding the place so damp and ruinous looking, while Sir Walter would, I thought, have gone crazy with delight at finding it so old. The carriage, rumbling over a rickety drawbridge, awoke such a chorus of frogs in the stagnant moat beneath, that Sir Walter actually clapped his hands with glee, and declared that the sound reminded him of the greeting of Charles VI. when he arrived at his prison of Viviers les Etangs: "*Holà! où sont mes amis, mes cousins, mes courtisans?*" And from the moat beneath there arose a response, a hundred times repeated, so dismal and so desolate, that the king leaned his head upon the balcony and burst into tears. All this seemed doleful and depressing to me, while Sir Walter's spirits rose higher and higher at the *souvenirs* of ancient times with which the place abounded. The faculty of surprise, which I have entirely lost since then, was soon stretched to its utmost limit when we were driven through the gate. The Baron de Machecoul was standing on the steps of the portal, holding a stable-lanthorn in one hand, and a broad-brimmed, ragged straw-hat, which he had doffed in honour of his guest, in the other. He was the very type, so I have since been told, of the native Breton nobleman—hero of the Vendée, Chouan chief and royalist leader. Although short, broad-shouldered, bald, unshaven, and loosely dressed in the *brayes* and open-hanging vest—the common costume of the country—he yet looked the gentleman, nay more, the nobleman, every inch of him. He wore sabots on his feet like the most humble of his own peasants, and the shirt which the open vest left exposed to view was anything but clean; yet there was no mistaking him for other than he was. The feet encased in the clumsy sabots were small, and the ankles thin; and the hands, which reached far below the grimy sleeves of the vest, though burnt and freckled by the sun, were finely shaped, and the wrists delicate

and slender. He made us welcome with an equal degree of courtesy, evidently at first mistaking me, with my distinguished appearance, for an aristocratic friend of Sir Walter. I felt indeed quite humbled by his civilities, and feared that my master would take offence. But Lord! my master saw nothing, heard nothing, but the Baron de Machecoul, representative of a nobility whose patent, he told me in a whisper, dated from long before the crusades, and was signed by Charlemagne. If he had informed me at the same time that the shirt on the Baron's back dated from the same epoch, and that his last washerwoman's bill bore the same signature, I should not have deemed it any greater marvel.

If the personal appearance of the most ancient member of the *noblesse* of Brittany had inspired me with a kind of indignant disgust, that of his domestic arrangements completely upset all my preconceived notions of the fitness of things in this world. What I saw of the manners and habits of the old-world *noblesse* of Brittany during my sojourn in the Baron de Machecoul's household, I must not describe. That page of my existence as gentleman to an Englishman of noble birth is too dark to be unfolded. To begin—I know not how to call the apartment into which we were ushered, for if it were the kitchen of the chateau, then, was it decorous of the Baron to use it as his dining-room? If the dining-room, was it not derogatory in the Baron to allow the cooking to proceed under the great wide chimney all the while we were at table? A great oaken board without any cloth was spread at the top of this stone hall; the coarsest and most common kind of clay pottery was arranged around. The table was laid with three covers, and the Baron, after reckoning on his fingers and looking at me for a minute, went to the great carved oak chest in the corner of the chimney, and dipping his head and shoulders right to the bottom, drew forth a huge goblet of massive silver, lined with gold, with a spoon and fork of no mean weight. At sight of these my master went into ecstasies, and examined them with the mag-

nifying-glass he always carried, holding them to the light of the oil-lamp with two beakers which swung by an iron chain from the rafters, and began as usual the whole history of the manufacture—the date, the artist's name—a history, in short, which might have lasted for ever, had not the Baron warned him that supper was waiting. A huge bowl of barley-meal was then ladled out from the skillet on the blazing fire, and placed upon the table ; and a servant, old and toothless, hobbled to the doorway and blew a cowhorn ; while the Baron, placing both hands to his mouth, called out in a lusty voice : "*Ho hé ! Les gars, les gars !*" At which signal a whole troop of wild-looking savages, who had been waiting at the door, burst in. They were headed by our friend the driver of the vehicle which had brought us to Machecoul, and all looked as strange to civilization and the courteous bearing of the servants' hall as he. There was a long, narrow table placed cross-wise at the bottom of the hall, and round this they gathered tumultuously. Sir Walter looked at them complacently, murmuring to himself the Celtic names of their different garments, and evidently full of interest in their appearance, while to me their presence was absolutely shocking. Their sabots clattered with deafening noise upon the stone flooring; their sheepskin vests — smelt most offensively. In short, one may say that every sense was injured and insulted—the eye by their uncouth, shaggy aspect, the ear by the clattering of their sabots, and the nose most of all by the dirty steam of their sheepskins. They stood for some minutes in reverent silence, the clattering and the scuffling ceasing as if by magic, when the door before which my master was standing, with open mouth and staring eyes because of the big brass-nails with which it was studded slowly opened — and entering with noiseless step, and shading the lamp whose light had guided her through the draughty passages and down the icy staircase, came the most beautiful girl, I think, I had ever beheld. Slim, delicate, and very fair, with the light thrown full upon her countenance, she looked

the very impersonation of one of those angels in the great picture-gallery at Graywood Abbey. Her beautiful golden hair hung straight down each side of her face—transparent, vapoury like, a glittering cloud, and her large blue eyes, reflecting the light of the lamp, shone out like stars upon the firmament. She still wore the costume of the pupil-novices of the Visitation of Machecoul, which convent she had quitted but a short time before. Her dress was of pale-blue serge, with a wide gumipe or pelerine of white cambric spreading over her shoulders and bosom; the sleeves of the dress, though long enough to fall over the hand, were so wide that they hung loosely away from the wrist, and showed the delicate form of the arm, which rivalled in whiteness the broad cambric cuff with which the sleeve was terminated.

I stood transfixed at sight of this vision of beauty amid all the squalid ugliness surrounding me; while Sir Walter himself was startled into forgetfulness of the brass-headed nails three-corned and chiselled in the form of a trefoil, and, letting the door fall slowly back upon its hinges, stood still to gaze upon this new guest, so distinctly different in form and feature from the other inmates of the chateau. The young lady walked into the hall as if in a dream, so thoroughly unconscious did she seem of any addition to the usual members of the supper-table; and she had actually advanced to what I supposed must have been her usual place, by the side of the Baron, before she perceived that there were strangers present; and Sir Walter, whose attention had never before been attracted for more than a minute to any object that savoured not of antiquity, was standing all the while gazing on this beautiful creature with as earnest a gaze, as fixed an attention, as though she had been at least three thousand years old! The Baron de Machecoul took her by the hand and kissed her coldly on the forehead; then saying hurriedly to Sir Walter and myself, "This is Mademoiselle Marguerite de Marsangy, my niece, Messieurs," drew near to the table and motioned us to our places. I felt quite uncomfortable at being thus ad-

mitted to the table of the Baron under false colours, as it were; and it was not until Sir Walter himself had sanctioned my acceptance of the honour, although by merely an absent-minded nod of the head, that I ventured to approach. To be sure, if I found the first table too much above me, I should have regarded the second as altogether too low, and I therefore with modesty took the place assigned me. As for Sir Walter, he seemed to be entirely absorbed in contemplation of the young lady who stood opposite to him; and I must say I never before saw so much admiration expressed in his eyes for any living object whatever.

When all the domestics had assembled, the door was closed, and Mademoiselle Marguerite said grace in a pure, touching tone of voice, to which all listened with head reverently bent low, with clasped hands, and eyes uplifted to heaven. I noticed that Sir Walter—who was not much of anything in the way of religion, indeed might be said to have more reverence for paganism because it was the older form, but who, belonging to the great Catholic Worledges, had been christened Catholic at all events—actually made the sign of the cross when grace was concluded, irresistibly following the example of the rest of the household. A description of the repast might soon be given. The oatmeal porridge was ladled out by the Baron himself, into deep platters of inch-thick brownish clay. And to see the gusto with which they all devoured it! The servants sat round the lower table, in the middle of which was placed a huge vessel filled with the same delectable mess, and they plunged into their wide-gaping mouths, with a periodical snort that made me shudder, large flat wooden spoons, which went in full and brimming over and came out again clean as though scoured by the scullion. The Baron and Sir Walter talked much of the Celtic language during the repast, of the roots and origin of certain words which had never been translated into any other tongue. The dishes, or rather, the absence of all dishes, being, as it appears, in accordance to the "pure Celtic custom," pleased my

master exceedingly, and he ate of the pig's feet *à la grouille* and of the oaten galette with the greatest relish; while I could not touch a morsel of either, having beheld the ceremony of tasting of the one and the peculiar way of ascertaining the heat of the gridiron for the other, as practised by the Bretonne who cooked, and which, I suppose, were of Celtic origin likewise—but as to being "pure," that I deny. When the supper was over, the same solemnity of saying grace was repeated, and once more did the gentle tones of Mademoiselle Marguerite arise like incense and purify the gross atmosphere of the hall. And then the *gars* scuttled off in their sabots to the different holes and corners in which they were to pass the night; while the fair young girl withdrew as she had entered, taking her lamp from the marble slab at the door, and gliding out the same dim and beauteous shadow she had appeared on entering.

No sooner were we left alone than the spell which had bound Sir Walter seemed to have been loosened as if by magic, and he suddenly started to his feet, exclaiming:

"The gates! the gates! Monsieur le Baron. Here have I come all the way from England to behold them, and have been already more than two hours in the chateau without having yet seen them!"

The Baron smiled—a lurid smile, I thought—and instantly called for his lanthorn.

The toothless old domestic who had served us at table, and who was now seated in the chimney nook smoking his pipe, rose and walked before—the Baron and my master followed arm in arm, while I brought up the rear. It was well that the moon was at its full, for the solitary tallow candle in the lanthorn would never have sufficed to guide us over the mounds of earth and rubbish, the fallen stones, the dunghills and heaps of rotting manure, with which the way to the chapel was encumbered. As it was, I once or twice stumbled and nearly fell, and my bruised shins bore token, for many a day after, of the peril I had undergone. I could hear my master groan heavily now and

then, and saw him reel and totter so that he would have fallen had not the strong arm of the Baron upheld him. But if one might judge by the shout of delight with which, on emerging from the rough ground and the shadow of the wall of the chateau, we came into the full stream of light and face to face with the gates of the chapel, he must have been amply rewarded for his pains—while for myself I felt as if no sight of the kind could ever compensate me for the split boots, the torn inexpressibles and rent overcoat, with which I came up, hobbling and groaning and rubbing my shins, to the spot where he was standing absolutely petrified with wonder and admiration at the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul! And by degrees, in spite of all my suffering, I began to excuse his ecstasy, for I must own that never before had I beheld or dreamed of anything in the way of art, especially—good gracious!—in common blacksmith's work, which could come near to the effect produced by these gates just as the moon in full glory was shining upon them. They seemed chiselled like ebony, tooled like the finest goldsmith's work, carved and perforated like the finest oak carving; then, again, here and there varied by dark masses artistically thrown forward to reflect a shadow on the surrounding parts. The moonlight was so strong that the most rare and singular effect of light and shade was produced, making these prominent masses stand out in as bold relief as though they had been laid upon a solid background; for the light behind them was of variegated colours, thrown by the moon upon the stained glass of the ogive windows of the chapel, thence descending in streams of colour —the crimson, the violet, the blue, so vivid, they looked almost opaque upon the mouldering tombs of the knights and barons of Machecoul. Sir Walter was struck dumb, but his silence itself spoke with far more eloquence than did his usual screams and shouts of admiration; and above all was I pleased to find that he did not give way to that dancing and capering which was always a great mortification to me before strangers, but which I understand is generally accepted as the

only genuine expression of delight on the part of an antiquary when confronted with any rare and precious piece of antiquity.

The Baron de Machecoul remained likewise silent for some moments, evidently enjoying the surprise of this true admirer and probable purchaser; and then taking the lanthorn from the hands of the old servant, who, I observed, crossed himself devoutly, he strode up to the gates, and having taken the candle from the lanthorn, threw the light upon the different portions of the work. If the execution had seemed magnificent viewed as a whole, how much more marvellous did it appear when examined thus in detail! The gross design was that of a grape-vine bearing leaves and fruit and tendrils in every variety of growth and position. Intermingled were the flowers and rambling stalks of the deadly nightshade, which showed that the designer had begun his work with one of those conceptions in his head so common to the artists of the middle ages, who were called upon to realize, by the satirical allegory of art, the new-formed doubts and denials of theology—which were rife throughout the religious world some time before their public avowal by Luther; at least so did Sir Walter explain the combination of the two plants together. But throughout the whole, hither and thither, seemingly in the wildest confusion, although in reality designed with the most consummate skill, were scattered a troop of devils in full pursuit of the flying souls seeking refuge beneath the leaves, clinging to the fruit, hanging on to the stem. Everywhere life and movement, all giving the idea of the rapid whirling of the Sabaoth dance of witches, and making the very sense ache with its apparent rapidity. Even the miserable tallow candle borne by the Baron was sufficient to set the whole design in motion. As the light fell upon each group in turn, it seemed as if it became detached from the rest and was approaching the spectator. The fiends were executed in the most finished manner, some leering, some coaxing, others threatening, according to the character of the peculiar soul of which

they might be in chase. And the expression displayed by the poor little souls was also a thing to be admired: some laughing, only too willing to be caught; others, again, fleeing full of terror and dismay—some imploring for mercy, others defiant, and foolhardy, inviting the enemy to come on and do his worst The sharpness and finish of the whole really seemed to place this simple piece of ironwork on a level with the finest picture or the most elaborate carving ever wrought by painter on canvas or by sculptor in the finest marble. Even I was in raptures, and walked to and fro before the gates almost as much lost in admiration as Sir Walter himself. A strange fascination was produced upon the brain by this rapid reeling motion intended to be represented to the eye, and you felt as if by remaining long in contemplation of the whirling mass you would fall to imitation of the strange grotesque movements of the merry fiends. I could now perfectly understand the uncouth hops and clumsy capers, the sort of awkward jig wherein arms as well as legs bore equal part, which Sir Walter, evidently unconscious of the action, began to execute before it.

"It is always so when the full moon shines upon it as it does to-night," said the old man in his cracked and trembling voice; "the devil is playing the fiddle to the dancers. Although we do not hear it—the fiends do, sure enough."

CHAPTER III.

THE LEGEND OF THE GATES.

How long Sir Walter's infatuation might have continued, I know not—perhaps until morning, had not the Baron, tired of the admiration he had himself created, and weary with moving the candle to and fro, sometimes at arm's length above his head, at others stooping low almost to the very ground, suddenly turned and replaced the light, now almost burned out, back again into the

lanthorn, exclaiming that it was time to retire, for the night was advancing, and that Sir Walter could resume his examination in the morning. But Sir Walter was not the man to be interrupted in the full tide of enthusiasm by any consideration whatever, and to my utter amazement, who knew how careful he was of his health and how afraid of damp and of the chill night air, he sat himself down by the side of the toothless old domestic, who had taken his place upon the ground with his back leaning against a stone and the lanthorn at his feet.

"The moon will soon be getting low," said Sir Walter, "and I really must wait awhile to see the shadows darken and the lights decay."

Thereupon the Baron threw himself upon the ground, without ceremony, on the other side of the old domestic, while I, who knew my place, remained standing behind them.

"The gates are in a strange state of preservation and freshness for the date you affix to them," said Sir Walter, who was already busy with pencil and pocket-book taking notes and observations by the light of the moon and that of the lanthorn combined.

The Baron evidently beheld in the remark an intimation of some doubt as to their genuine origin, for he answered sharply:

"No wonder at that—considering they have never been used."

"Why so?" exclaimed Sir Walter, abruptly.

"Ah! I forgot that you must be ignorant of the main point of their history," said the Baron. "They are the work of Biscornet, the blacksmith who is believed to have sold himself to the devil for guidance in the chiselling of the sanctuary gates at Notre Dame de Paris."

"By the way," interrupted Sir Walter, eagerly, "I thought I had seen something in the same style; but the work at Notre Dame is far inferior to this"—and again was the pencil busy on the leaves of the pocket-book, and again did the toothless old man fall to crossing

himself with more energy than ever, while the Baron, reassured by Sir Walter's speech, proceeded in a more cheerful tone :

"The story is a strange one, and, thank Heaven, I am either too old or too young to doubt its truth, and I believe it every word. Biscornet, as you know, was an armourer in the suite of the Duc de Bretagne, who followed his master to Paris, and was presented to the king by the Duke himself as the most skilful armourer in the universe, 'to whom indeed Satan himself could teach nothing he did not already know'—and gave as proof, the sword hanging by his side, the cross handle of which Biscornet had executed when a mere prentice lad to a blacksmith of Mortagne. Thereupon the king, who happened to be in a merry mood, kissed the cross handle and swore a solemn oath upon it that none other than Biscornet should execute the sanctuary gates of Notre Dame—this work being considered so important that the monks of the Chapter had refused to entrust it to any armourer in Paris, and were about to send to Flanders in search of one in whom they could place confidence. Poor Biscornet, who little dreamt when he left Mortagne that such a dangerous honour would ever fall to his lot, and who knew well enough all the peril of the great responsibility which had been thrust upon him, went that night, in despair, home to the poor hostelry of the Petit Lion, where he lodged with the rest of Duke Morgan's retinue. The host and all the guests had retired to rest long since, for the hour was late and the street was deserted. Biscornet's loud knock at the gate was answered by a tall, swarthy stranger, who bade him, in a gruff voice, enter and put up the staple behind him. So Biscornet, stepping over the horse-shoe fixed on the threshold and the big nails hammered into the stone in the form of a cross (the sure preventive of the entrance of evil spirits by the door), went and sat himself down sadly in the chimney corner, his heart too full of melancholy to allow him to think of sleep. The stranger seated himself on the wooden settle opposite. For a time they remained

thus gazing at each other in silence, until the stranger suddenly nodded at Biscornet and exclaimed:

"'No, no, *mon garçon*, the job will *not* be your ruin; it will be the foundation of your fortune—that is if you choose that it should be so.'

"Biscornet was dumbfoundered. Without his having uttered a word, the stranger had answered his thoughts: he must have known what was passing in his mind. And the poor fellow looked at the man in dismay; but the man only nodded again in the same cool manner as before, adding, abruptly:

"'And moreover, Biscornet, if you want help, I can give it you. I have power to make your name immortal if you will only trust yourself in my hands when the work is done.'

"Poor Biscornet was completely bewildered, and agreed to all that the stranger proposed. The contract was binding for three years, during which time the blacksmith was to obtain wealth and honour. At the end of that space, the stranger in his turn would be entitled to claim Biscornet as his own, and to make him follow wherever he might lead. Biscornet knew well enough where this would be, but his situation was desperate, and, as he said, with unholy mistrust of the saints, it wouldn't be worse if he were already there; and so he accepted the conditions.

"Great was the surprise of the blacksmiths and armourers of Paris when they learned that the sanctuary gates of Notre Dame were to be wrought by a miserable workman from Brittany, and they laughed and jeered by anticipation, feeling sure that the work would be a failure. But when the result appeared, and the glorious gates were fixed to the pillars at the entrance to the chancel, the astonishment and admiration of the people knew no bounds. Of course you know them well. You foreigners, who have no comforts at home such as we have in Brittany, and are compelled to be for ever wandering in search of those domestic blessings we possess, see everything. We Bretons, happy and contented with the ease and

perfection we have attained, are too wise ever to leave them. I myself have never been to Paris, so have never seen Biscornet's gates, but feel quite sure they are not to be compared for a moment to those of Machecoul.

"Well, when Biscornet had well-nigh completed his three years' contract, living in the midst of affluence and splendour all the while, a terror seized upon the blacksmith's soul. Would the dark, mysterious guest of the Petit Lion return and claim his bargain, or would he consent to renew it?

"The doubt unmanned him, and he resolved to return in secret to Machecoul, there to conceal himself from the stranger's pursuit by taking the vows at the Celestins in the Forest of Kerven. He had been some time in the village, and his contract was within a few hours of its expiring term, when he came in anguish to this very chapel to pray for mercy and deliverance from his enemy. His prayer was just about to turn to thanksgiving—for the warning tick of the clock announced the hour of midnight—and he was just sinking down to kiss the very earth in token of gratitude, when the form of the traveller suddenly appeared before him.

"'Ha! ha! you thought to escape me, Biscornet of my heart,' said he, with a hoarse laugh. 'But my trade is that of traveller, and there is not a corner of the earth in which I could not find you out. You are mine—your body is mine, your soul is mine, and you are bound to do as I bid you. You have cheated me, Biscornet, in the gates of Our——Paris. You left the middle gates unwrought and plain for the service of the church, for the—well, you know what I mean—to pass through. Now you shall make me a pair of gates for the chapel of Machecoul, through which every priest who passes shall become *my* servant, and shall no longer be enabled to serve the master to whom he was bound. These gates must be without the opening of straight iron bars like that which foiled me so at Notre—well, Paris. Yes; I know what you would

say. You need not speak. I know well enough that it was Canon Thibault who had those bars wrought at his own expense, by his own workmen, and put them up with his own hand. He has studied necromancy, and has succeeded in baffling me this time. However, in the present case no Thibault will be here. And, Biscornet, see that you make them broad and high for the great portal, so that when the Procession passes through I shall reap a goodly harvest. This time, however, I shall superintend the work myself.'

"And Biscornet, grown weak and cowardly from long indulgence in the good things of the world, consented to save the miserable remnant of his life on the same conditions as before. And there did the stranger stand by Biscornet's side all the while he hammered and forged and brought out the design of the stranger's own invention, until the very life seemed to be oozing from every pore; and he grew thinner and thinner, and the light in his eyes grew dimmer and dimmer, and at the last touch of the chisel he dropped senseless to the earth. The workmen and the neighbours crowded round, and the stranger bade them all, every one of them, run for the doctor; and when they returned, neither Biscornet nor the stranger were to be found. Both had disappeared, and were never seen again.

"In spite of his servitude, Biscornet had managed to elude the vigilance of his guardian at some time or other, for a paper was found, half scorched and burnt, wherein he had recounted the above facts.

"The Bishop of Laval opposed the fixing of the gates at Machecoul, and my ancestor, the Baron Evan of Machecoul, was compelled to pay five thousand silver marks for the privilege, and cause ten thousand masses to be said for the repose of Biscornet's soul. Everybody thought that Evan de Machecoul would never dare to place the gates upon the holy chapel of Our Lady, but Baron Evan had never feared the devil, and soon found means to baffle him in this case. He caused the great portal to be removed to the other end of the chapel, and so the procession of the Host passes out unopposed. The

door of the chapel, as you will perceive, is behind the altar, but the privilege of cheating the devil is certainly worth a sacrifice. The first time that the procession passed before the gates, the priest threw holy water on them by way of exorcising the evil spirit supposed to be lodged amongst the carving; but they say that the drops hissed and bubbled so violently as they fell that it became plain to all that the iron must be burning hot, and the people grew alarmed and fled. Never since then has the experiment been tried, and the fear of evil influence is so great amongst the people that not a soul dare venture even to look at, much less touch, them. Thus have they escaped destruction, so have they remained as you see, the beauty of their workmanship unimpaired; and the price I have set upon them of fifty thousand francs cannot be considered as too high, when you behold the admirable preservation even of the minutest fibres of this mighty work."

The listeners to this wild tale were of widely different degree in matters of religion. Sir Walter was strongly suspected of believing neither in God nor devil; the Baron feared God and defied the devil; while the old domestic trembled equally before God and devil. And yet the strangest thing happened at that moment. When the Baron had concluded his story, he added by way of epilogue:

"The people about here believe most firmly that the blacksmith Biscornet walks around his work on moonlight nights such as this, and that his footsteps are distinctly heard by some, although inaudible to others."

The old serving-man trembled violently, and rattled his beads rapidly through his fingers. Even Sir Walter, strong-minded as he was, rose to his feet; and the Baron crossed himself again and again as he muttered a prayer between his teeth. With all three the impression was only one of momentary awe inspired by the associations connected with the place. But I—who had listened to it all without the slightest emotion, treating the whole as the clumsy imagining

of a bygone superstition—I alone remained trembling from head to foot, straining my ear with painful effort in the direction of the chapel, for as sure as there is a God in heaven I distinctly heard the sound of footsteps pacing the coble-stone pavement which surrounded the chapel wall—a measured step, too. It advanced near to where I was standing behind the group, as I have described, and came almost close to me—then stopped abruptly, and I heard it no more!

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW.

MEANWHILE Sir Walter had arisen, and had placed his arm within mine, declaring that the night air had stiffened his limbs, and he did not feel equal to the task of walking back unaided. The way to the chateau was, however, straight and easy enough, the Baron having led us by the deserted entrance merely that the sight of the Iron Gates might take Sir Walter by surprise, and we arrived without any of our former trouble at the foot of the staircase which led to the chamber assigned to us. According to French fashion, the two guests were accommodated with a double chamber—one very small, and possessing no egress save through the one of tremendous size opening on the staircase, the smaller chamber being nothing more than a kind of dressing-closet dependent on the other. Sir Walter was greatly pleased with this arrangement, and mentioned that he should have been much annoyed had he been put to sleep alone in the larger room. Whether the chill night air or the excitement of the evening had overpowered him I know not, but he seemed unusually depressed and low-spirited. He had stayed out of doors too long, and there was no means of getting him his milk posset. The sight of the bed, however, with its moth-eaten

canopy of ancient tapestry and fusty feathers, funereal as it looked to me, cheered him immensely, and he paused before climbing the steps of the estrade to make a note of the subject portrayed upon the curtains. It was the sacrifice of Abraham; and he grew quite nervous and fidgety about the date of the design, which would have told him immediately by whom it was executed. The moth had eaten away a portion of the legend underneath; but he knew he could restore it.

"Only give me my pocket-book, and hold the candle steady, Lafleur, and I shall soon have established the real facts," said he, briskly. "But, dear me! where is my pocket-book? Look for it, Lafleur; you always manage to lose everything."

But I looked in vain; the pocket-book was nowhere to be found. It had evidently dropped from his pocket either on the stairs, or else had been left at the stone where he had been seated before the Iron Gates.

"I cannot do without it, Lafleur," said he, "and you must go and look after it. You will find it, I think, on the grass, at the chapel; you will easily discover it by this bright moonlight. I am really sorry to send you out again, but it serves you right for not taking more care of things. A scarlet morocco pocket-book with a silver clasp, must be easily discernible. Now, be quick—and don't stay so long as you generally do, as I want to take my notes before I go to sleep."

I was dismayed at the request. Never since the days of my childhood, when my mother, an excellent woman in every other respect, was cruel enough to insist on my going to fetch her slippers from under her bed in the dark, had I felt such a qualm come over me as when Sir Walter uttered these simple words. They sent a cold shiver right down my back. I thought it best at first to pretend not to have heard them, and busied myself about the room, and heaped the travelling cloaks and rugs upon the bed, for in spite of the two great logs upon the hearth, the place felt horribly cold and damp, and looked dreadfully dreary; and then

I fell to beating the ashes, and raking them to the front in order to throw out the heat, and then very cunningly, as I thought, wished him good-night, and prepared to steal softly to my own closet.

But Sir Walter was never to be foiled in any determination he had conceived, and became positively cruel in his thoughtlessness concerning the pain and trouble occasioned by his whims; and although I had already tucked him up with the greatest care, he actually tossed his arms out of bed, and thumped the bedclothes with impatience at beholding my hesitation.

"Positively, Lafleur, you get more and more imbecile every day. Why don't you make haste? I tell you I *must* have my pocket-book at once. I should never be able to sleep without it. Supposing any one else were to get hold of the mass of information it contains, and despoil me of the just consideration it is sure to bring me when made public! I must have dropped it on the stone when that old fool got up so suddenly on being told that cock-and-bull story of the footsteps. He startled me so, that now I recollect having dropped it just as I was about jotting down the height and breadth and other items concerning the Iron Gates."

"But how shall I find the way?" said I, feeling quite sick with alarm.

"Why, go down the narrow stair the Baron showed us as we came. It leads from yonder door right into the courtyard in which the chapel stands."

"But the staircase is old and rickety, and in the dark—"

The objection seemed to irritate Sir Walter, and he actually screamed forth, "You were fool enough when I took you twenty years ago, Lafleur, and your stupidity goes on increasing every day. If the stair is dark, as you say, then take a light, and don't stand shivering there like an idiot, as you are; and above all, make haste back, for I don't half like the idea of being left all alone in this strange place. Good heavens! are you never going to move? I have a great mind to put you to shame by getting up and going to fetch the

pocket-book myself!" And as he spoke he wrapped the bed-clothes more tightly round him, and drew them close up beneath his chin, so that I could see nothing but his eyes shooting fire and flames at my delay; and thus was I compelled to do his bidding.

I lighted the little twisted taper he always kept in his travelling desk, and set forth on my terrible errand, taking care, however, to leave the door of the room ajar, and to ignore the piteous cry with which he called me back to shut it.

I cannot describe the horrors of that walk of five minutes' duration at the utmost. If any man should presume to call me coward for the agony I endured, let him try the same nocturnal ramble in a strange outlandish old tumbledown chateau which bears evidence to the sense of being haunted—that's all. However, I arrived at the bottom of the winding stair without accident—the sense of injury I had sustained at my master's hands, the wonder occasioned by the phenomenon of a man who knew so many languages never having learnt that of amenity and courtesy in the relations between employer and dependent, with the attention I was forced to give to my footing, being of use in diverting my mind from the remembrance of the mysterious footsteps which had so shaken my nerves.

By the time I had passed through the narrow oaken door at the bottom, I really felt better than I could have expected. The air had become chill and damp—it is always so in Brittany—and a slight haze had arisen which made me cough. This was something of a relief, for the strange position in which I had been placed by the tyrannical caprice of my master had almost made me lose the consciousness of my own identity; and I walked on tiptoe along the coble-stone pavement which ran along the chapel wall, with more courage than I had dreamed of possessing. I was almost brave as I drew near to the corner of the wall, where the moon made all things look white as snow, in strange contrast to the blackness of the shadow in which I was enveloped. Just as I neared the corner,

the great clock of the chateau began to strike—a most unpleasant sound it had too. I had noticed it at supper-time. Like everything else about the place, it seemed discordant and quivering and uncertain in its tone, stopping a mortal while between each stroke. I knew it could only be eleven, and yet I could have sworn that I counted twelve. I arrived at last at the angle of the wall; a sudden gust of wind at that moment extinguished the taper, but it was of no importance, as the moonbeams poured so strong down upon the portal of the chapel that I could see every object as clearly defined as in the broad light of noon. And yet once more did I tremble with a faint and foolish fear, and my heart ceased its beating for a moment. I was sure that I again heard those footsteps which had turned the very current of my blood before! I paused and leaned against the wall before I rushed into the moonlight; and as I stood thus, trembling from head to foot, the sound of voices reached my ear, and, what was more disquieting still, it came from the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul! I was close to the angle of the wall; I could not see the speakers, but I could not choose but listen, neither could I help hearing what was said. Deep-toned, full of passion, was the voice of the man who spoke, and eager and earnest were the words, though hurried in their utterance.

"Yes, love; yes, I depart. I have been dismissed with contempt and scorn by the Baron de Machecoul—commanded never more to cross the threshold of his chateau. He has enforced this separation between us, but he cannot separate our hearts. You are mine by every holy vow; you have sworn never to belong to another, to bear no other name than mine. You are my affianced bride in the sight of God."

He paused; and I was standing, now, so near that I could hear his long and laboured breathing as he gasped between each sentence that he uttered. Then came the soft, sweet voice in answer—the voice I recognized in an instant, although I had heard it but

that once at the supper-table invoking a blessing on the poor food we were about to take, and its accents were as grave and solemn as on that occasion:

"Nay, fear not, dear Marcel, that I should falter in my faith, or renounce your love for any other that this world can bestow. My heart is yours, Marcel, and yours alone. The alliance my uncle forces on me is not one, alas, which should make you jealous. He told me, but to-day, that he had already pledged his word —nay, more, that he had signed the agreement with the Superior of the Visitandines that I should enter the Order at once, and that it was to pay my dowry as Noble Lady of the Chancel that he had determined on disposing of the Great Iron Gates to the rich Englishman who has come all the way to Machecoul to purchase them. So you see, my dear—my beloved Marcel, there is no resistance possible; for how can I deny my God? For His sake alone would I resign my love for you."

The young man's figure I could now discern, as I had gained courage enough to creep stealthily forward and peep from behind the grinning mask of the *gargoyle* which projected at right-angles from the wall; and although I could not catch a glimpse of his features, yet the precipitation of his speech, the impatience of his gesticulation, told plainly of the emotion under which he was labouring. It was evident to me that Mademoiselle Marguerite was standing within the chapel behind the Iron Gates; she had entered the building by the inner court, while the young man had arrived by the same way that we had taken when led by the Baron through the yards and dependencies of the chateau and along a portion of the open road. She stood on the other side of the grating; a fold or two of her blue serge dress was all I could discern.

"Mourn not for me, dear Marcel," said she again, in a low, melancholy voice; "my path will be short and peaceful to the grave. You will go forth into the world, and find——"

But the young man suffered her not to proceed; the

silence she had mistaken for that of sadness was caused by rage and not despair, and he burst forth in a storm of fury. He stamped his foot with savage energy upon the pavement.

"No, no. I will have none of this vain subterfuge and weak hypocrisy, by which all feeble minds seek to find a palliative for falsehood and abhorrence of responsibility. Talk not to me of vows to God! He would reject the sacrifice of a heart already pledged to an earthly love. Marguerite, you are mine, you cannot deny it now, it is too late to recall your plighted vow. You are my first, my only, love. You have sworn before God, and the Virgin Mother, and by the holy saints, in all of whom *you* so devoutly believe, that I am yours. No power on earth can part us now; no power in heaven can sanction the breaking of that solemn oath!"

I could hear the sobs of the poor maiden as she struggled to reply. Her broken words conveyed all the terrors which beset her soul. Her uncle's will seemed as binding a decree as that of heaven itself, for it is so still in Brittany, and the idea of offending a parent or natural guardian is considered as great a sin as that of disputing the justice of God. But the young man accepted no such scruple as sacred. It was evident that he was quite as tyrannical and imperious as the Baron de Machecoul, and that the poor girl was likely to be crushed between the two. His tone was harsh and bitter as he spoke again in answer to the terror-stricken arguments of Mademoiselle de Marsangy, and he actually struck his boot against the bars of the iron gates until they rang again, sending forth a hollow, threatening sound, as if in sympathy with his violent reproaches.

"I tell you once more, Marguerite, that I will not listen to all this false and childish reasoning; no, no, there shall be no other bridegroom; no other bridal can be yours, however holy; no convent can have power to release you from your oath. Once more do I remind you, for you seem to have forgotten, that it was taken before God and the Virgin, and sworn to before every sacred power *you* so much reverence. Why, I, who

am only a poor weak sinner, child of darkness and perdition, as your priest and your abbess would no doubt call me, would never dare to break an oath taken with such solemnity. Marguerite, you are mine, I tell you once again, and I summon you now to fulfil my claim."

He was silent for a few moments' space, during which the girl's deep convulsive sobs broke upon the stillness of the night with heart-rending violence.

But the youth appeared to be unmoved by this terrible display of grief, for he again spoke in a loud and peremptory tone :

"It is for the very purpose of binding you to the faithful observance of your solemn oath that I am here to-night, and as token of my earnestness of purpose—my determination to keep you in remembrance of its solemn power—I have brought the betrothal ring to rivet the link which your own sacred oath has already forged between us."

The maiden's sobs alone were heard in answer.

"If it be not exactly fitted for the occasion, blame not me, but the impatience of my love which can suffer no delay. It was my mother's marriage ring. She bade me with her dying breath take it from her finger as soon as she was dead, and keep it for ever as a remembrance of her love ; but the poor soul will absolve me from my promise. If she beholds me now she cannot but rejoice that I should part with it for such a purpose. Read well the motto graven on the gold, take it well to heart, Marguerite : 'Nil Deus, nil Satanas, Potens Solus Amor.' It might shock your Lady Abbess, but will show you how we children of the people are taught to love, and trust, and *die*, if needs must be, rather than break our faith."

There was another silence, during which he must again have struck the iron framework of the gates with his foot, for they sent forth the same hollow, lugubrious sound they had done before.

"Give me your hand, Marguerite," exclaimed the young man, abruptly ; "your left hand ; here, pass it through this opening beside the grinning devil with the

projecting horns ; there, that is well, 'twas bravely done ; and now, remember this, what would have been but sinful weakness heretofore, will henceforth become impardonable crime."

The poor girl was now giving way to a fit of hysterical weeping, which must have shaken her slender frame to pieces, for I could hear her shivering sobs from where I stood. But, nevertheless, she must have obeyed her lover's stern command, for he said, in a softened tone :

" Thank you, thank you, dearest love ; now, then, I have nought to fear, and I can return to Paris without disquietude. Not even at the summons of the Baron de Machecoul would you dare to play me false. Even a woman would scarcely be bold enough in her weakness to go up to the altar of the Lord, with such burning vow yet trembling on her tongue, and the ring of betrothal to her worldly love upon her finger ! "

And then the tones of his voice changed to ineffable tenderness, as he said :

" And now, farewell, perhaps for long, my own dear, sweet Marguerite. Be sure that wherever I may go, my heart will turn to my own betrothed bride. My hopes of fortune are well founded, and as soon as realized, I shall return to claim you in the face of the whole world. My plebeian birth I cannot change, and your uncle's consent to our union must be wanting, but we can wait love, we can wait until, by the law, you are rescued from his eagle talons, my own fair, timid dove. Farewell, farewell."

He imprinted one fervent kiss upon the hand which must still have remained extended towards him through the iron tracery of the gates, and soon the sound of his retreating steps was heard to pass rapidly down the encumbered way through which we had advanced with so much toil and pains, but which his youthful step had traversed at a bound.

CHAPTER V.

THE RED MOROCCO POCKET-BOOK. THE BRIDAL RING.

I REMAINED for a few moments motionless, rivetted to the spot, impatient to be gone, yet unwilling to run the risk of being seen by Mademoiselle Marguerite, and thus adding to the burthen of her sorrow the conviction of its having had a witness.

Sir Walter was right in his conjecture. The pocket-book, visible enough with its bright scarlet cover and glittering snap, lay shining in the moonlight close by the upright stone. I was just about to spring forward to seize it in all haste, when a loud shriek burst from the lips of Mademoiselle de Marsangy—a deadly shriek expressive of both physical pain and mental anguish, such as I had never in my life heard before—"Marcel! Marcel! Come back! come back! The ring! the ring! Oh, God! he hears me not, and I am lost." And she shook the iron bars until they once more clanged harsh and discordant on the midnight air. My situation was perplexing in the extreme. I did not dare to advance, so fearful was I of disturbing the poor maiden in her sorrow, for I deemed this outburst owing to no other cause than the abrupt departure of her lover; and so I waited until all was once more silent, and then I stole out to seize the pocket-book. As I turned I looked towards the chapel, and plainly beheld that retreating form alternately sinking into darkness and emerging into the many-coloured light thrown by the stained glass windows of the chapel, reminding one of the legend which tells of the passage of the condemned spirit through the ghastly, ever-changing fires of purgatory. When she had disappeared I drew near to the Iron Gates. The demons seemed to be grinning with a more fierce and fatal enjoyment than ever in their weird pursuit after human souls. As I threw a half-timid glance over the great work of Biscornet, quite reassured, however, against all superstitious fears by the terrible drama of real life to which I had been listening, I was startled at beholding

a glittering object clinging to the sharp spikes—catching the moonbeam—just on a level with my eye, or I should have failed to notice it. It was a broad, flat gold ring, no doubt the very ring which the lover had passed over the slender finger of his betrothed, and which must have slipped from it when she had drawn back her hand. By one of those strange chances which sometimes happen to confound all our wisest calculations, the ring had fallen upon the sharp, pointed horn of one of the devils, most prominent of the whole work, the very one pursuing with such cunning leer the soul of the novice. At that moment all superstitious dread was hushed in the greater awe inspired by the tempest of human passion to which I had just been witness, and I took the ring hastily from its unseemly resting-place, resolving to find some excuse, some well-disguised motive, for giving it back to Mademoiselle Marguerite on the morrow. As I passed my hand along the iron spike it became moistened and clammy with the dew as I thought upon the rusting iron which no care or attention can prevent from gathering here and there on the parts most exposed. I was just about to place the ring in my waistcoat pocket when the confounded old clock of the chateau began suddenly to rattle the ominous, waving, quivering, and long-drawn-out warning of its funeral strike. The sound so startled me that pocket-book and all escaped from my grasp, and the scraps of fidgetty little bits of paper covered by Sir Walter's pencil with innumerable figures and calculations of height, breadth, and date of everything old he had ever met with were scattered at my feet. Had the breeze arisen at that moment, I should never have dared to return to Sir Walter's presence! I stooped to pick up the scraps, even though I knew this time that the clock must in reality be striking twelve, and scrambled them all into the pocket-book again with tolerable precision; but the ring I never could find again, although, despite of a little faltering of my courage, as silence succeeded to the reverberation of the clock, I felt carefully amongst the crevices of the

stone on which I had been standing, and passed my hand carefully along the ground about my feet. But the search was unsuccessful, and so with shaken nerves, and heartily sick of my noctural adventures at Machecoul, I hurried back along the coble stone pathway, and reached the door of our staircase without further impediment.

"Twelve o'clock! I have been absent one whole hour. What will my master say?" thought I, as the cheery light of the fire from the open door of Sir Walter's room met my gaze. I entered on tiptoe, in fear and trembling, dreading the sharp reproof with which I felt it more than probable I should be assailed. But, for a wonder, no peevish remonstrance met my ear. The cruel old egotist lay wrapped in a slumber as calm and sound as that enjoyed by the Egyptian mummy he had taken such pleasure in unrolling, and who lay in a long wooden box, staring through the lid, to the great terror of the housemaids, and the delight of Tom Higgins, who always would insist upon the strong family likeness between the master of Graywood and this specimen of the humanity which walked the earth three thousand years ago. So, rejoicing in my good fortune, I slid quietly into my little closet and closed the door. I felt sick and faint with the strain upon my nerves, and looked around for the washstand, for my hands felt clammy and uncomfortable ever since I had searched for Mademoiselle Marguerite's lost ring amid the tracery of the iron gates of the chapel. The meagre light of the taper showed the little room in all its nudity. There was no carpet on the red brick floor to protect the feet from cold, but there *was* one on the top of the chest of drawers to protect the marble from the dust, and upon it stood a little milk jug in a small pie dish, and at the side a coarse hempen towel. As the milk jug was full of water, I was fain to conclude that the whole paraphernalia was the best substitute for a washing-stand to be found in the chateau of Machecoul, and proceeded to my scanty ablutions accordingly. As I turned back my wristbands I per-

ceived that the dark red stains upon my hands could never have been produced by the rust of iron, moistened by the night dew, as I had imagined. On my sleeve and on my wrist they were well defined, lurid, and dull, the unmistakable spots of blood! Another mystery was here, for I had no wound, and I was lost in conjecture as to the manner in which my hands had become thus stained. Another mystery connected with the chateau of Machecoul! How I hated the place as I glided into my narrow bed, with the coarse hempen sheets and mattress of close-pressed feathers, torn from the yet warm carcases of the barn-door fowls belonging to Monsieur le Baron; and how I hated the Baron himself and the whole household of Machecoul, save and except the sweet and gentle Marguerite. When I thought of her my eyes were filled with tears, and I lay awake till the first peep of dawn, thinking of her sorrow and sending her a blessing from my very heart. When at last I fell asleep, my dreams were so uneasy and disturbed by the crowing of the cocks and the beating of the flails in the barn immediately opposite my window, to say nothing of the tossing of the heavy trusses of hay from the loft above on to the pavement below, that I arose even earlier than my wont, to find the chateau of Machecoul more dull and ghost haunted as it were, by day, than it had appeared even which lighted by the moon on the night before.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIGNING OF THE DEED—THE BLOOD-STAINED HAND.

As I had expended my scanty supply of water, and as no such thing as a bell was known in the chateau of Machecoul—the only means of obtaining assistance being to shout from the window to one of the men in the farmyard, who would clamp round to the kitchen and give the order—I was compelled to run down

myself to fill my jug at the pump. The scene I beheld there could never be described in English, although the right words might be found for the purpose in the Celtic tongue. The Baron de Machecoul was there gathering water in the hollow of his hands, which after throwing into his face he wiped away with his red checked pockethandkerchief. The "gars," too, were there, standing around him, but they seemed in nowise troubled concerning their morning ablutions, and they were only waiting for orders from their master.

Sir Walter was awake when I returned. He was well pleased at finding his pocket-book on the table by his side. He had sorted the papers which I had huddled in pell mell, and was already busily at work drawing the subject of the tapestry, and the carvings on the *ciel de lit*. He was particularly merry and good-tempered, never once finding fault with my service, nor yet bestowing a reproach upon the negligence with which I had disturbed his papers, even condescending to banter me for my objection to the Celtic forms and observances by which we were surrounded. At the time I wondered at his affability, but it was not till long after that I learned its cause.

The cowhorn sounded in due time for breakfast, of which repast the description would be as sickening as the reality was to me. The same barleymeal porridge was ladled out and the same ceremonial of grace observed as at the supper. But this time the sweet soft voice of Mademoiselle Marguerite was replaced by that of the youngest of the "gars," the little *pastour*, who from the lower table repeated the benediction all in a breath and his mouth wide open all the while. After what I had seen and heard on the previous night I did not feel surprised at the young lady's absence, but Sir Walter was much moved, and evidently put out each time that his eye rested on the empty chair before him. The barleymeal porridge, Celtic as it was, seemed to have lost its charm, and he merely sipped at the very edge of his spoon what he had swallowed by the bowlful at supper the night before. When break-

fast was over, the Baron, in a peremptory tone, wherein spoke the tyrant, bade the slatternly old female who seemed to be the only domestic of the fair sex belonging to the chateau, tell Mademoiselle de Marsangy that her presence would be required instantly in the study.

"Now then shall we behold the civilized portion of this strange establishment," thought I, as I prepared to follow, at Sir Walter's bidding, the footsteps of the Baron into what, judging from the antecedents furnished by Graywood, I supposed to be the *sanctum sanctorum* of Machecoul. We were soon seated in a long, low, dingy, unpapered room, with no ceiling to hide the bare rafters, from which hung suspended long festoons of onions and beans and gourds of every description. Upon the hearth, however, a splendid fire of fir-logs was blazing away in most hospitable style; and above the chimney were hung fishing-nets, and guns, and traps, and stirrups, all of them of such uncouth and ancient make that Sir Walter kept falling into a series of ecstasies which completely disgusted me.

"Mademoiselle Marguerite is indisposed. She has met with an accident," said the Baron, when he and my master were seated at the oaken table before the fire. "But we can do nothing without her, for she is my secretary, and keeps my accounts. She translates at sight into French the Bas Breton reports of the farmers. In my day, neither reading, nor writing, nor spelling were considered necessary to the *noblesse* of Brittany, and even now we cannot see the good of so much learning, which is clearly useful for priests and women only, and not for husbandmen and warriors such as the noblemen of Vendée have always been."

And then the Baron opened the door of the study—the window was not made to open—and roared out for Evan to tell Mademoiselle Marguerite to make haste, as he disliked waiting. The Baron was evidently impatient to terminate the affair of the Great Iron Gates, and over-anxious, I thought, to keep Sir Walter to his bargain. He went to the old wooden desk, which stood in a nook by the fireplace, and drew out a roll of

stamped paper, all ready drawn up by the notary for the transfer of this, to my mind, worthless trumpery to Sir Walter Worledge, of Graywood, for the sum of fifty thousand francs—the money to be paid down in hard coin, without any deduction for the cost of transfer, which was all to be at the sole charge of Sir Walter—and he spelt over the deed with complacency, although rather puzzled now and then by the apostrophes and accents.

"I would not sell them at all," said he, with a sigh, as he smoothed down the paper on the table, and laid a brand new quill, plucked from the wing of one of his own geese, carefully across it, "were it not for the greedy pretensions of the Abbess of the Visitation, who will admit to the chancel no lady, however noble—and who could be more noble than Mademoiselle Marguerite de Marsangy?—under the monstrous dowry of fifty thousand francs. Ah, well, if I could only have had the money to expend in manure, I could raise crops that would rival those of the reverend fathers of Saint Bénédict at Cervalon. The soil of Machecoul is so cold and barren, it requires so much help. If the reverend fathers of Saint Bénédict had not been assisted, they could not have raised such crops as they have done either. Now, if the Abbess would only have allowed half the dowry to remain at interest, it would have been the saving of the meadows down by the sand-pits. But she is inexorable, and will not hear of either delay or compromise. And then the argument is this: None of the noble houses of La Vendée can afford to take a portionless bride into their family; and fifty thousand francs, after all, may be regarded as the smallest sum that can be accepted for the Chancel of the Visitandines. The Lavals, the Locmarias, the Saint Servans, all have their daughters there. Rich husbands there are none in Brittany. A portionless girl is a sad burthen, quite a pest in a family. Only see, if it had not been for my grand niece, Marguerite, I might have laid out the price of the Iron Gates in manure, and so have saved the meadows by the chalk-pits at Monat."

All the while he had been speaking, I noticed that Sir Walter's little round eyes had been growing more cunning and eager with each word, and once he slapped his forehead as if a sudden idea had struck him, and that he wished to keep it there. The entrance of Mademoiselle Marguerite put an end to the conversation, and my master turned and bowed with instinctive homage as she approached. She was deadly pale, and trembled so violently from evident exhaustion that she could scarcely advance. While the Baron growled out an angry reproach at her tardiness, Sir Walter courteously sympathised with her suffering. She drew near to the table in silence, her large blue eyes, grown dim and pale since the previous night, wandered round the group as if in search of some one whose absence was a source of perplexity. She seated herself at the table mechanically, and proceeded to dip the pen into the inkstand, and then I perceived that her left hand was bound up, and that she held it carefully concealed beneath the loose sleeve of her blue serge habit. The tears rose to my eyes when I gazed upon her pallid face as she leaned back in her chair in evident pain, unable to hold the pen from sheer nervous exhaustion. The Baron was vexed at the delay caused by this unforeseen accident, and grumbled without mercy; but my master, on perceiving the uneasy position in which she was compelled to hold her arm in consequence of the awkward manner in which the bandage was applied, bade me look to it, reminding the fair sufferer that being himself devoted to ancient customs, he had insisted on my getting instruction in the elements of surgery, and that Lafleur was a most skilful *valet de chambre chirurgien*, to whom she might confide her wound without fear. She did not even answer nor even look towards him by way of thanks, but extended her arm towards me as I approached, and I gently loosened the bandage. The gash was a frighful one, and I no longer wondered at the shriek of pain I had heard from the chapel door, nor at the loss of blood which had taken the colour from her cheeks and the light from her eyes.

"She has cut her arm with the glass window," said the Baron, impatiently. "Young girls will always be looking out down the road."

"It is more like the rending gash made by an iron spike," said I, softly, in her ear, "it is jagged and uneven, not like the sharp cut of glass."

She looked up at me piteously, while a faint blush overspread her pale cheek. She seemed to implore my secrecy even without having any cause for suspicion that I could possibly know her secret. How I hated myself for the awkwardness which prevented me from administering the only comfort to her sorrow! If I had only been able to have given her back the affianced ring! She thanked me sweetly for the care I had bestowed by my careful arrangement of the bandage, and we proceeded to business. But Sir Walter, perceiving the inconvenience to which she was put by the awkward position in which she was compelled to hold the left arm, suggested courteously that I should write the copy which she should dictate on the part of the Baron. And thus was I instrumental in effecting the sale of the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul, "for the sum of fifty thousand livres in coin," for the *noblesse* of Brittany still have a horror of bankers' cheques or of bills of exchange, or even in some cases a bank note itself, in the full belief that no bank is deserving of such trust and credit as an old Chonan sash of white knitted wool, which can be hidden in the great linen press by the side of the kitchen chimney.

The ceremonials of French law are proverbially tedious, and how much more so those of Brittany, where everything that does not move at a snail's pace stands still altogether. My master's new whim was to make me copy out the manifold documents necessary to the composition of the long dissertation upon the origin and execution of the Iron Gates with which he meant to regale the Society on his return home. But I did it all with a cheerful heart, for I felt sure that our departure must be drawing nigh, and I worked hard at the never-ending description of the florid iron work

with right good will, although the job of translating and annotating was the most tedious I had ever undertaken.

It would have seemed, however, as if there were never to be an end to the mysteries of Machecoul. Instead of hurrying the removal of the gates as I had expected my master would have done, with the fidgety nature I knew so well, he seemed to delay, with a sort of self-satisfied complaisence I had never witnessed in him before, the work of dismantling and packing of the treasure; and when at length they were really down, he insisted on such minute attention being paid to them that one would have thought they were jewels to be placed in a lady's casket.

All this while he ate of the bread and drank of the cup, poor as they both were (the former being made of rye, and the latter of honey), at Machecoul, without once expressing a regret for the comforts and good cheer of Graywood Abbey. And he would walk with Mademoiselle Marguerite up and down the "Plaisance," the shabby, mangy-looking plot of grass, bordered by a clipped yew-tree hedge as shabby and mangy as the rest. And I used to watch him from the window where I sat at my tedious copying as he capered about beside her, talking eagerly in her ear, while I could see that her thoughts were far enough away, and that, indeed, she could scarcely know that he was at her side, for now and then, at the very moment when he seemed most interested by his own discourse, I observed that she would raise herself on tiptoe to gaze above the yew-tree hedge out upon the open road beyond. And then he would delight to take excursions with her to the cromlechs and menhirs, and other relics of the Druids in the neighbourhood. On those occasions, however, he required my attendance, and then the "voiture de Monsieur le Baron" would convey us to within a mile of the place, for these Druids, who must have been the very personification of ennui, and have made a boredom so solid around them that it has lasted to this day, were sure to place their stones in the middle of some dreary

plain or desert inaccessible to carriages. I used to carry the basket for conveyance of the chips and fragments, of which Sir Walter always provided a certain quantity to keep him company during the long solitary evenings at Graywood, and I was therefore compelled to keep close beside him in his researches amongst the mysterious stones. Poor Mademoiselle Marguerite, feigning fatigue, was wont to hide herself in the shadow of the massive ruins, evidently worn out by the persistent attentions of Sir Walter, and glad to be left for a moment in peace. Once I found her thus lying flat on the turf, with her face buried in her hands, and weeping as if her heart would break, which so affected me, that I could hardly execute the puerile errand on which Sir Walter had despatched me—which was to bring her a flower he had gathered in the crevice of the menhir he was visiting, bidding her wear "this yellow marguerite" for his sake. It was no marguerite, as you may suppose, but a common dandelion, by the powers! but Sir Walter was too learned to know the difference.

I knew not what to think of all this. So contrary was such behaviour to my master's usual habits and ways of thinking, that after due reflection and reasoning with myself, I came to the conclusion that Sir Walter Worledge of Graywood Abbey was about to adopt the portionless orphan of Machecoul, and that he meant to regard her as his daughter, and constitute her his heiress. The prospect made my heart rejoice exceedingly, for Sir Walter had no one on whom he could rely to comfort him in his old age, and it was evident that the poor girl had not much happiness to expect in life, whether spent in the home of her great uncle the Baron, or at the convent of the Visitation.

All things come to an end at last, and in spite of the evident prolonging of the task by Sir Walter, the packing of the Iron Gates was accomplished, and the day came when we all stood to see them depart on one of the Breton *haquets*, a species of vehicle which has been handed down from the ancient Celts to the modern Bretons, apparently with strict injunctions never to

change its form. I stared with as much astonishment on beholding the *haquet* as I had done at sight of the Baron's carriage some little time before. The *haquet* of Brittany is nothing more than a collection of planks upon four wheels, the latter constructed of rough hewn solid blocks of wood, through which the axles project about three feet on either side. Nevertheless, my heart leaped with joy when I was called upon to write the direction, "Sir Walter Worledge, Graywood Abbey, Monkstone, Kent, England," for I felt quite certain that my master would not stay long behind the treasure he had been at so much pains to acquire, and as I watched the heavy Breton cart slowly rumbling its way down the heavy Breton road, I felt as if we were already half-way upon our journey home.

I was confirmed in the idea of our speedy departure from Machecoul by the command I received next day from Sir Walter, who, with an indescribable twinkle of the eye such as I had never observed in him before, save on occasions of the discovery of some flaw in a fellow antiquary's report to the Society, to write immediately to Surtees the steward to get the chapel of the Abbey put in order, and to present the accompanying receipt to the bank at Monkstone for the plate belonging to the altar, so as to have everything in readiness by the day of his return, and to send the enclosed letter to summon Father Raymond, the chaplain, from Canterbury, where he had been enjoying his leisure long enough. "It is time he began to work again," said Sir Walter. "We must all do our duty in this world—ha, ha!" And as he sat down for me to shave him, he actually hummed to himself some ancient tune of his long departed youth, a thing he had not done since the arrival at Graywood of the mummy from Egypt, with the solemn assurance that it was the body of a daughter of one of the Pharaohs.

My brain was so dazed and perplexed by all these changes in Sir Walter's humour, that instead of falling back in a fit as I should certainly have done a little while before, I listened with a stoic petrefaction of every

faculty to his wondrous reply to the commonplace observation I uttered just for the sake of saying something:

"We shall soon be on our way back to Graywood now."

"Ay, but we shall not go back alone as we came," said the baronet, turning so suddenly round that the razor almost slipped from my grasp, at the risk of depriving him of the most ornamental portion of his nose; and half shaved as he was, with the soap suds still hanging about his cheeks and ears, I actually saw him blush so deeply through the white lather, that I was startled into the fear of apoplexy. I said not a word, however, for I was rather bewildered, and went on lathering with the most feverish activity.

"Yes, Lafleur, you will be surprised to learn that the Baron de Machecoul is to accompany us, and more than that, Mademoiselle Marguerite de Marsangy will condescend to make one of our party."

This time I must frankly own that I did so far forget myself as to allow my startled nerves to get the better of my skill, and the razor slipped so suddenly that one of the most angry of the pimples on Sir Walter's chin was beheaded as sharply as ever traitor was beheaded on Tower Hill. But, strange to say, although the shock must have been sudden, Sir Walter never noticed it, but went on musingly, as if talking to himself, while I was staunching the wound as quickly as possible.

"Yes, Lafleur, the Baron goes to England in order to touch his money more securely, and to aid me in setting up the Iron Gates of Machecoul."

"And Mademoiselle Marguerite?" said I, in a trembling voice, for I was beginning to scent treason in the air, and knew that, whatever was about to happen, such close league between these two malicious old men could bode no good to any one but themselves. "And Mademoiselle Marguerite?" I repeated, seeing that Sir Walter hesitated to reply.

"Ah, well, *she* is going for a change."

And then he patted his chin daintily, and tittered in such comic fashion, so provokingly, that in trimming

his hair, which was abundant, stiff, wiry, and grey, and stood up all round his head like bristles, I pulled it quite savagely. But even this he did not feel, and then I knew there must be mischief brewing in his brain, and I was made so exceedingly uncomfortable by the conviction, that I hazarded another remark!

"Mademoiselle Marguerite must certainly need a change—from the gloomy old chateau, which must appear more gloomy still with the prospect of no other escape than to the Convent of the Visitation."

I said this, perhaps, with more point than I even intended, for Sir Walter looked up suddenly into my face, and said, with his old detestable, cunning wink:

"Lafleur, you are a clever fellow—too clever—there is no keeping a secret from you. You guess all in a minute. But wait awhile, and you shall know our secret without fishing, as you are now doing."

And with that he nodded his head significantly, as is the wont of masters with their servants when they wish to check any advance towards what they deem an unseemly familiarity; always treating us in this respect with the same puerile severity they use towards children; indeed, I always find that they regard us exactly in the same light. No words can describe the agony of curiosity into which I was thrown by all this reticence. I did not dare encourage the first idea which arose in my mind, for amongst all the suspicions which had nestled there during the long years passed in Sir Walter's service, that of downright insanity had never been suffered to hold a place. I could not bear to associate the beautiful Marguerite with the Baron's strange freak of proceeding to England. Whenever her image rose to my fancy I dismissed it with a shudder, for I felt as if I should be made, in spite of myself, to join in the conspiracy which I feared had been hatched in the brain of age and cupidity against youth and innocence, and, above the rest, that helplessness of habitual submission, engendering the most abject cowardice of all.

However, the journey was evidently decided on, what-

ever I might be thinking all the while. And among the many marvels which surrounded the event none was greater to me than the apparent indifference with which the Baron treated the step which to him one would have imagined to have been the most important incident of his whole life. With the fatuity peculiar to ignorance, instead of being impressed with the solemnity of a visit to England, he seemed to treat the event with the most superb indifference, of not more importance than a casual trip from Machecoul to Saint Auran, the nearest village on the Laval road. I beheld the prospect of this visit with a shudder of disgust, and a terrible shadowing forth of what would be said in the servants' hall at Graywood Abbey when the uncouth appearance and queer costume of "the nobleman from Brittany" came to be discussed under the superintendence of the housekeeper. There was some consolation in the great beauty and unpretending attire of Mademoiselle Marguerite, who could only be regarded as antiquated and out of date by the smart housemaids, but could never be classed as ridiculous. In the grey woollen dress and broad straw hat which replaced the costume of the pupil-novice of the Visitation she looked as graceful and elegant a lady as any to be seen at the Court of Queen Charlotte on a royal birthday.

The journey was performed in Sir Walter's own good stout family-coach, which had been sent from England by his desire, for in spite of his Celtic proclivities he preferred the modern facilities provided for travelling by the Anglo-Saxon race to a bullock car or a rumbling old leathern vehicle like the "voiture de Monsieur le Baron." From the rumble behind I could see but little of what was passing within the carriage. Now and then, on the occasion of a steep ascent, when we were moving slowly, I could hear the voices of the two old men sometimes in amicable dispute, sometimes talking gaily, and the echo of their hideous laughter would sound far out over the silent fields like the mirth of jovial fiends over the helpless victim they had ensnared. Not once did I hear the accents of Mademoiselle

Marguerite, save now and then translating the French vocabulary into Celtic words, which Sir Walter, making her repeat over and over again until her voice grew weary, would say after her. The little wiry old man would never rest; the fire in his veins could never have been of the earth, and it certainly was not of heaven, for it possessed the power of scorching and withering the mental faculties of every human being who approached him. For myself, I only know that when I entered his service, twenty years before, I was active, bold, and vigorous; and now——But it is not of myself that I would speak.

The journey passed off without incident. Each time we stopped to change horses and I presented myself at the carriage door to offer my services, I always found Mademoiselle Marguerite leaning back in a corner with her face hidden by her thickly-folded veil and her whole frame drawn up and contracted like one suffering from intense mental anguish.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "SHIP" INN AT DOVER.

It was not till after we had landed at Dover that her eyes met mine—their expression was not to be mistaken—they implored, they beseeched me, to save her from some grave misfortune she felt was about to befall her; they bade me defend her like a man from the peril in which she stood. Mine did their best to answer the appeal. God knows how they managed to say what I really meant, but they must have been understood, for on the very evening of our landing, while being led through one of the dark passages of the renowned "Ship" tavern, she contrived to let the woollen scarf slip from her shoulders, while I was following close behind with the furs and the tippets, and the dressing-case belonging to my master. The excuse was given

for her to leave Sir Walter's arm for a moment, and I deposited my burthen to pick up the scarf and replace it on her shoulders. She turned aside to thank me, and never shall I forget the deep tremulous tones of the voice in which she whispered:

"Help me! oh, help me; in the name of our Blessed Mary! I am helpless and forlorn, and must surely be about to die, or I could not thus have lost all sense of what is fitting to the purity and self-denial of a maiden's life. Here, here, take this! Let him have it quickly! For God's sake do not refuse! Nay, there is no harm, we are betrothed, we love each other tenderly—he with hope—and I without. The Baron de Machecoul himself——" she paused to take breath, and then pursued hurriedly, "brought him to our home. He was sent six months ago to make the designs needful for disposal of the Iron Gates; and when he told my uncle that he loved me, and was ready to take me without a dowry, he was driven from Machecoul with scorn. But we contrived to meet for some time after that, and it was only the very night that you arrived at the chateau that he bade me farewell."

The concluding words were uttered as rapidly as her breathing would permit, and all the while her fingers were searching with convulsive haste among the folds of her shawl, whence she presently drew forth a small sealed letter.

"You will not betray me, I know," said she, tenderly. "Just think how cruel it would be were I to leave him in ignorance of the place to which I have been carried. You see how lost to all sense of maiden modesty I have become through despair at my position. The lines contained in that note bid him come at once to my relief, for my soul is breaking down under its heavy burthen. Burn it, if you despise me; but if you have loved in your youth and can remember the desperation to which the prospect of abandonment may lead, let him have my message at once, remember, for time presses. Let it be posted this very night."

She thrust the letter into my hand roughly, almost fiercely, and then turned and ran precipitately back to Sir Walter, who exclaimed in half-angry mood:

"How slow and awkward you are, Lafleur! What a time you take for the adjustment of a lady's scarf! You will have to learn more dexterity, or you will never be able to remain at Graywood."

I did not answer, but stood lost in amazement, holding the letter in my grasp until it was well-nigh crushed to atoms. But I did not betray the poor girl, nor neglect the request so strangely urged, and until this day none have ever known the part I bore in the dreadful tragedy that afterwards befel.

That night Sir Walter was more confiding and condescending than he had been for some time. He made two or three efforts to converse, even going so far as to invite conversation on my part. But I had been too seriously impressed with the secret which had been heaped upon my soul to heed his advances; besides which, the memory of the snubbing he had inflicted on me, the very last time I had made an attempt to attract his confidence, was still fresh in my mind.

And it came at last. In the large, well-furnished, comfortable bedroom of the "Ship," just as I was congratulating myself on being once more in Old England, where the very inns possess comforts unknown to a nobleman's dwelling in Brittany, did the horrid confession I had alternately dreaded and then repulsed, as being too monstrous, come from my master's lips. I had attended him to bed as usual, and again after a long interval administered, to his delight and mine, the milk posset as of old, with a comfortable dash of Madeira, and had taken the empty cup from his hand and given him, to wipe his lips, the snow-white napkin, the like of which I had never seen during the whole time of my stay in France, when to my amazement, instead of lying down composedly as was his wont, he remained sitting up in the bed, and looking almost timidly up into my face said, faintly:

"Sit down here by my side, Lafleur. I want to tell

you something which, after all, concerns you almost as much as it does myself."

A cold perspiration broke out upon my forehead, and I stared aghast at him as he proceeded.

"Well then, Lafleur, since it must be told some time or other, I have determined on—well—on—what shall I call it? Well—on rescuing that poor orphan girl, Mademoiselle de Marsangy, from the dull atmosphere in which she had been condemned to live and die, and—in short, making her fortune. She is henceforth to be considered as the future mistress of Graywood Abbey."

"Ah! then I am right after all," exclaimed I, joyously. "Having no children of your own, you have determined on adopting her——"

"I have," returned Sir Walter, "taken that same determination of adopting her as you say, not as my daughter, as you evidently think, but as my wife!"

Now, although I had for a long time dreaded this avowal, I had not absolutely expected it to be made thus abruptly, and at the first moment I was so overcome that I absolutely groaned aloud.

"I see you are moved, Lafleur. Honest fellow! to take such interest in your master's happiness. Yes, Lafleur, I am about to marry. All has long been settled between myself and the Baron, who, in spite of his rustic breeding, is as cunning an old fox as any in the world. The fifty thousand livres I am to pay him for the Iron Gates, instead of going to the Abbess of the Visitation, will be spent on manure and irrigation and drainage of the domain of Machecoul. That is why we were compelled to leave the chateau *sans tamblour ni trompette*, as the French say, for the Abbess is said to be a maîtresse femme, and would have raised an outcry throughout the whole province at the breach of contract of which the Baron has been guilty with regard to the dowry. She was empowered indeed to have put in opposition to Mademoiselle Marguerite's marriage unless the dowry to the convent had been paid all the same. So the Baron has completely out-

witted the old lady by having the ceremony performed here."

"And Mademoiselle?" said I, in a gasping tone.

"Oh! the dear girl says nothing, and you know silence gives consent. The Baron tells me in confidence that no girl of noble birth in Brittany would ever dare to rebel against the decision of her natural guardians in the matter of matrimony. And we will make her so happy at Graywood, Lafleur, that she will never have cause to regret Machecoul. She will teach me the Celtic of Brittany, of which I know but little. She will pass the morning delightfully alone with me in the library, and will do all my correspondence with the French Académie. In the afternoon, while I take my nap, she will walk in the park with Cousin Priscilla, for I should not like to become the dear girl's jailer, and in the evening she will read to me the various reports sent in to the scientific Societies of France to which I belong."

I shuddered at the bare prospect of such a life.

"See now," continued Sir Walter, "here is the letter I have written to my fair cousin, Priscilla Jarvis, informing her of the step I am about to take. I know the dear creature will be delighted, for she has for years and years been urging me to wed, and always earnestly advising me never to marry too old a person, with habits already formed, as mine were so peculiar. She will be overjoyed, I am sure, to see that I have followed her wise counsel. She cannot but look upon it as a great compliment to her wisdom and experience."

He chuckled with malicious glee as he spoke, and then, after a moment's pause, added hurriedly:

"And now I should think I have told you everything but the most curious circumstance of all. At least, I have told you as much as your shallow brain is capable of receiving at one time, and you may go. But, by the way, before going to bed, just run to the post with my cousin's letter. You will find it on the mantelpiece. I want her to have it at once."

With this he laid himself down quite comfortably, tranquil and contented, as though he had not been contemplating as great a crime as any ever committed by the vilest scoundrel on the face of the earth, the blotting out from existence, the obliteration of the joys and pleasures of youth; the life-long captivity, in short, of one of the fairest and most lovely of God's creatures.

I felt as if it would be treason to my own manhood were I to offer congratulation on the perpetration of what, in my own heart, I deemed a deadly wrong, and so, sniffling and whimpering, for I could hardly contain my emotion, I shuffled across the room to the mantelpiece, siezed the letter nervously, and without even bidding my master good-night, I hurried from the room. I heard him titter as I closed the door.

"Honest fellow," murmured he; "he loves me truly. His heart is too full to speak. I saw the tears in his eyes. Honest fellow, honest fellow; not much brains, but plenty of heart!"

Why did I not turn back then and there, and tell him all I knew? Had it not been for my coward fear, I might have saved the history of Graywood Abbey from the catastrophe which has rendered it a byeword and a fear throughout the whole country round.

But what a strange fate was mine to be the bearer of these two missives, destined to oppose each other. By the light of the Post Office lanthorn I read the superscription on the tiny billet—"A Monsieur, Monsieur Marcel Moreau, 18, Rue St. Jacques, a Paris." I knew well enough it could be addressed to none other, and I dropped it into the box with a heavy sigh, feeling with instinctive self-contempt that I was making myself a party to treason on every side, and that it seemed as if I were in reality a traitor to all.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHOOSING OF THE BRIDAL RING.

THE next evening we arrived at Graywood Abbey. The poor, beautiful Marguerite seemed to wither gradually away as we drew near to our journey's end. When the carriage drove up the avenue she looked for a moment towards the building which was to be her future home, and then, with a cold shiver, and gathering her cloak more closely around her, as if the sight of the grey, ivy-grown, grim-looking pile had sent a chill through her very frame, she cast down her eyes and looked at it no more. The servants had all turned out to meet us, and the tenants had likewise assembled in great numbers, for Sir Walter was regarded as not the best, but the most careless, landlord in the country, which is considered by the farmers as far better, and he was popular enough. Father Raymond was at the hall door. He was one of the jolliest of his craft, with round fat face and laughing blue eyes, a protuberant abdomen, and short, pudgy, white hands, which he extended in the act of benediction towards the ill-assorted pair who were ascending the stone steps together. The good-natured priest spoke some few words of congratulation, to which Sir Walter answered with a simper, and Mlle. Marguerite with a sob. Miss Priscilla waited to receive them in the drawing-room. She was pale and trembling as the bride, but her palor was that of rage. While her lips breathed a welcome to the bride-elect, her eyes glared at her with a mischievous glance, terrible in its expression of hatred and contempt. *She* did not think the girl handsome, that was evident; for when, at the bidding of Sir Walter, she was compelled to lean forward and kiss her on both cheeks, she turned up her nose with an expression of disgust, and sidled away without further notice. The Baron de Machecoul engaged much more of her attention, and as she spoke French with tolerable fluency,

and the Baron, by reason of his high rank, no doubt, had never been required to learn any other language than his own, there were few at the Abbey, save Sir Walter and myself, with whom he could converse. I must say that Miss Priscilla seemed always ready to sacrifice her time to a conversation with the Baron, and I knew her malicious nature so well that I felt convinced that this feigned interest could only be excited by the desire of gaining information concerning Mlle. de Marsangy. I am inclined to think that she began her tactics on our very first arrival, and that she gradually drew from the "garrulous Celt" the whole history of the poor girl's love for Marcel Moreau, the low-born, penniless young artist, who had been driven so unceremoniously from Machecoul, for I observed that, after devoting herself to the Baron for some little while, she suddenly made him over to young Surtees, the steward's son, who had been indulged by his father with three quarters' schooling at the cheap academy at Guines, and was therefore proud of his French "acquired on the continent." Miss Priscilla gave the Baron entirely in charge to this young man, with strict injunctions to keep him as much as possible engaged away from the house amid the woods and fields in which he was greatly interested, while she from that time devoted herself entirely with grim self-sacrifice to constant attendance on Mlle. Marguerite—hook nose and sharp twinkling bead eyes were always made for spying—and I boded no good from this excess of attention.

In spite of the celerity with which all proceedings relative to the accomplishment of matrimony by the Catholic Church in England are fulfilled as compared with the continent, still they are tedious enough to prevent the hasty unions, sometimes so bitterly repented at leisure, which take place among the Protestants; and notwithstanding the haste and impatience of all, except the bride, it was not expected that the marriage of Sir Walter Worledge and Mdlle. de Marsangy could take place before three weeks had passed. Meanwhile, the arrival of the Great Iron Gates furnished to Sir Walter

a most appropriate balsam to the irritation produced by impatience. He seemed awakened to a new existence. The unpacking of the gates was to him a source of the greatest excitement, and his childish joy at beholding the various groups as they were one by one divested of the paper, the tow, the hay, the canvas, in which they had been enveloped, was curious to witness. For the moment, I am quite sure that his bride only occupied a secondary place in his mind. He would stand over the men employed in the work the whole day long, fidgetting and fuming, ordering and counter-ordering, until he had reduced them to the same state of imbecility he often produced in me. At first he would insist on the presence of Mademoiselle Marguerite, and she would have to listen to the oft-repeated rigmarole of antiquarian research until they brought back to memory the night of anguish which even I had not forgotten, and remember still to this very day. And then the faintness which would come over her would force him to release her; and he would grumble at me for having allowed him to have them unpacked against the wall of the stable yard. "I ought to have known," he said, "that the odour of the stables was disagreeable to a lady."

Poor Marguerite's martyrdom was now exchanged for that of walking with Miss Priscilla, who seemed resolved not to accept as a sinecure the charge of the young bride, but watched her with the most unremitting perseverance night and day.

But, Lord bless you! there be none so closely watched but that Cupid will catch the watcher napping at some time or other, and the magnetism, or freemasonry, or whatever you may call it, of love, was never more fully illustrated than in this instance. How the intercourse between the lovers was renewed I never could guess. I knew well enough how Monsieur Marcel Moreau had learnt the secret of Mdlle. Marguerite's whereabouts; but how Mademoiselle Marguerite had heard of his arrival at Graywood will remain for ever a mystery to me.

We were now within six days of the marriage. As the ceremony was to be quite private, no public rejoicing or festival was to be held in the village, and, indeed, but little stir was made about the event, even amongst the household. The excitement of despair which had seized upon Mdlle. Marguerite seemed gradually to be giving place to a passive stolid indifference—a state which I knew to be far more dangerous than any. Sir Walter's whole attention was taken up by the Iron Gates. He noticed nothing that was going on around him, but I am confident that Miss Priscilla observed—and with a malicious satisfaction, too—the sad change which was taking place in the poor girl's already fading desolate appearance.

So great had been Sir Walter's pre-occupation concerning his favourite hobby that it was not until within a few days of that fixed for the marriage, and the Great Iron Gates had been entirely unveiled, that he bethought himself of one of the most necessary preliminaries of the ceremony, that of presenting the bride with the jewels belonging to the family. They had been safely lodged at his London bankers for many years, uncalled for and forgotten, and Sir Walter thought fitting to send me to London to fetch them on this occasion. After receiving his instructions which, with catalogue in hand, he gave me concerning "the red casket with the Worledge arms" and "the jewel case in green shagreen," with the oval box and the oblong box, and so on, the good gentleman drew from his desk a small sealed packet, which he told me to take at once to Hamlet the jeweller; and with his old cunning leer he looked up into my face, and said, knowingly:

"The wedding-ring, the wedding-ring, you know. Cousin Priscilla laughed like a lunatic when I drew my pen through that item in her list of necessary articles to be provided; but, Lafleur, I had already got one. She plagued me to show it, but I refused, for she is a sad chatterer; and I don't want any one to know anything about my secret until the first announcement of it appears in the Monthly Report on the occasion of

my wedding. It must be diminished in size for Marguerite; it is a delicate job, and none but Hamlet can execute it properly."

I snatched the packet from his hand with a feeling of contempt at what appeared to me nothing but an old man's puerile conceit and folly.

London was further from the country in those days than it is now; it took a whole day to arrive there from Graywood. With business to transact in London and the journey back, I knew that I could not return to the Abbey in less than three days. As I took my respectful leave of Mademoiselle Marguerite my heart sickened with apprehension. Her cheek was so wan, her smile so sad, the light of her eye so dead and dim, that the vision of her pale countenance haunted me during the whole time of my absence; and I hurried over my commissions with a vague, superstitious fear that some terrible misfortune would occur at Graywood Abbey while I was away in London. My busines was, however, completed sooner than I had expected; Hamlet had returned the ring, regretting the impossibility of doing more towards lessening it in size than by lining the interior with a coat of fine wax, as part of the motto—the greatest curiosity of all—would have to be cut away were he to attempt to diminish the circle. And so it was on the third morning by the early coach that I was deposited at the gate of Graywood Park. I ran rather than walked up the avenue which leads past the Druid's Stone to the hall door. The day was warm and beautiful, with that summer stillness in the air which calms and soothes the most ruffled bosom. But such was the impression of misfortune on my mind as I drew near to the gray old mansion; I looked up with such instinctive dread of the announcement of evil fortune, that I should have felt no surprise had I beheld the blinds drawn down and the shutters closed in token of mourning and distress. But no; everything wore the same deceptive look of peace and quiet happiness as usual. A figure was seated on the lawn, in front of the library window. By the broad straw hat

and blue ribbons which lay on the grass I knew it must be Mademoiselle Marguerite, and so great was my impatience to behold her, that I hurriedly crossed the lawn towards her. Could I believe my eyes? Could I believe my ears? She was leaning back in the rustic chair—the calm transparent light through the leaves of the cork tree at a little distance falling in softened shadow over her countenance. She was joyous—she was radiant—she was singing in a low, sweet voice, wherein was no touch of sadness, one of her Briton roundelays, which I remembered to have heard at Machecoul, sung to the biniou by the peasants on returning from their labour. A book lay on her lap, but she was not reading; her hands were clasped, and she was looking out far into space as she sang. Miss Priscilla was, for a wonder, not beside her, but the basket of coloured wools and the monster knitting-needles left upon the grass showed that she was absent but for a time. Mademoiselle Marguerite started at my approach, and ran towards me. I was thunderstruck at the change in her appearance; the delicate rose colour had returned to her cheek, the brightness to her beautiful blue eyes, which absolutely flashed and sparkled in the light as she turned their gaze full upon me. To my utter amazement, after looking round to see if any one was in sight, she seized me by both hands; and while a scarlet blush overspread her cheek and brow, she exclaimed, as she raised herself on the point of her toes to reach my ear:

"He is here! he is here! I saw him last night. Ah! Holy Mary be praised, he is not false, but—but—oh, Lafleur, what I have suffered! He is bent on meeting me again to-night; I told him what a kind friend you had been to me, and that I knew you would keep watch to give the alarm should any one approach."

"But where, mademoiselle, did you contrive to meet?"

"Not far from here,—there, down the hollow path which leads through the wood, at the open place by

the river—'The Gap,' they call it, you know—where the stone wall is under repair."

"But, good God! mademoiselle, how can he cross the rushing stream and climb the bank? The peril is most deadly. For mercy's sake let me go and warn him of the danger; we can surely find some other means."

"But he did it last night with ease," said she, interrupting me with impatience; "he is the most skilful horseman, and has procured a right brave and trusty English horse, brave and trusty as himself. He leapt the narrow stream at the gap in the fence; he found out the place where they are repairing the bank, and he will do it again to-night. But you, my only friend, must protect us from discovery."

My blood ran cold at the confession. The little river is a branch of the Swiftsure, which runs at the bottom of the park, and at the Gap its course becomes so impeded between the bank on one side and the heap of moss-grown rocky stones on the other, that it rages and storms and bubbles and hisses like a very torrent. This spot is called the Narrows; it is very deep, and so dangerous from the rapidity of the stream that it is looked upon with the greatest awe by the village boys, who gather round the place on Sundays to throw bits of wood and branches into it, and watch their instant disappearance. The bank, too, is steep and slippery, always broken and dangerous from the strong current, and the thought of the deadly peril of which they both —the one from the boldness engendered by denial of all danger; the other from innocence, and trust in her lover's skill and courage—were evidently unconscious, almost drove me mad with anxiety. I scarcely knew what I was saying when I was urging this upon her, and imploring her to tell me as quickly as possible where the young man was lodging in the village, that I might seek him out before night and warn him of the danger. But the poor child knew nothing, cared for nothing, would listen to nothing, but the one glorious fact which had changed the very current of her life

blood, and made it leap and bound through her veins with all the joyous activity of youth and hope, instead of pursuing the dull, torpid flow of age, and she kept repeating to herself, "He is here! he is here!" I could do no more than promise that I would indeed be her faithful guide to the Gap, and keep watch on the high bank above, while they held converse together on the path below. I did not consent to this without a pang. I knew well enough that the game I was playing was not a fair one to my master. I knew well enough that I ought to have refused to become a party to this conspiracy. But my heart was softened towards the poor maiden, and I verily believe that I must have confirmed Sir Walter's opinion of my being the greatest fool in existence, for instead of growing indignant at this proposal of treachery, I actually lost my head so entirely that, on seeing Miss Priscilla advancing towards us, I just gasped out, "Yes, yes; I will be there—I will be there!" and hurried towards the house to hide the emotion I would not have betrayed for the world.

Sir Walter had seen me from the study window, and was impatiently waiting for the jewels. Soon were they spread out on the table before him. They were all very beautiful, no doubt, but heavy, old-fashioned things, sadly wanting cleaning. Sir Walter, however, would have thought it sacrilege to have them reset or even polished up. One magnificent parure of emeralds was laid apart from the rest.

"Cousin Priscilla had chosen this set," said he, "for the bride to wear at the ceremony. *I* have selected the rubies; they are by far the most ancient, and have never been altered or retouched since they were worn by the Lady Worledge at the coronation of George the Second—and besides, my precious wedding-ring will suit much better with the sombre liquid colour of the rubies in their setting of dark red gold, than with the brightness of the emeralds or the flashing of the diamonds."

"But where is the ring, Sir Walter?" exclaimed I, anxious to behold the treasure on which he seemed to set such value.

"Ah, you may well be impatient," said he; "the Society itself, amongst all its antique gems, does not possess one so precious as this"—and with that he held the little packet returned by Hamlet folded between the palms of his hands and pressed it fondly. And then he looked so happy that it almost made him appear young again—a phenomenon I had observed in many of the antiquaries who visited Sir Walter when exhibiting something that must have been common enough in former days, but which they fancy that nobody but themselves can possibly possess now.

"It is such a strange story," began Sir Walter. "Do you remember, Lafleur, our first night at Machecoul, when I let fall my note-book at the stone before the chapel? Well, I fell asleep before you brought it back, and dreamt confusedly of the Great Iron Gates—of our Society—and, most of all, of the beautiful demoiselle, with whom it is true I had been much struck at supper, but towards whom until then I had felt nothing more than admiration. I awoke long before the dawn; I think it must have been your snoring from the inner chamber which disturbed me—but no matter. The first thing I saw on the table by my bedside was my scarlet-covered note-book, which I was right glad to see. I had gone to sleep quite anxious about the figures on the tapestry of the hangings of the bed. I could see that it was Arras work, but was not sure of the date; so I took up the note-book—there, just so—and was quite angry at the way you had closed it, the papers all higgledy-piggledy, the clasp inserted all awry, in short—well, never mind about that now. I opened it sharply, as you may imagine, and found all my notes and figures and calculations relating to the Great Iron Gates in a state of the most dire confusion—their order quite disturbed, their symmetry destroyed; so I set about arranging them neatly as they were before. I turned the papers out and laid them in their proper order on the bed before me, and still the book did not close. I shook it impatiently, when out rolled this ring. Look at it, Lafleur—only look at it. There, you may touch it,

examine it if you like, take it in your hand—there—poor Lafleur! Do not hesitate; you have my full permission; you are not taking a liberty. Tell me, did you ever see anything like it? The most ancient pattern of bridal ring known in Europe. A double circle, as you see, one enclosed within the other. And how beautifully adjusted! No man could make it *now*. Then you see by turning the upper circle it falls back, and the motto appears; and wonderful it is!—'NIL DEUS—NIL SATANAS—POTENS SOLUS AMOR.' 'Heaven is nought; Hell is nothing; Love is the sole Almighty Power.'"

He held the ring towards me. I could not take it although he bade me do so. It would have seemed a sacrilege for me to have touched it. Great God! it was the ring which had lighted upon the Devil's horn on that hateful night at Machecoul—the ring that Marcel Moreau had passed over the finger of Mademoiselle Marguerite through the iron tracery of the Gates. I knew it in a moment. Although the moonlight had not shown me the delicate adjustment or the device, I had seen as plainly—quite as plainly as I now beheld it in the broad light of day, the band of glittering gold. I must have gathered it up with the papers and thrust it, in the haste and terror of that awful moment, into the note-book which had fallen from my hand. As I stood gazing on it in bewilderment, all the foolish prating of Sir Walter fell unheeded on my ear. He went on maundering about the effect to be produced on the Society when it should come to be announced in their next monthly report along with the notice of his marriage.

"I have kept the secret to myself, Lafleur, because I have been preparing an elaborate description of it for the Society. They cannot beg it from me for the Museum then, as they have already done so many of my most precious treasures, and it will be safe with me for ever."

I heard him murmuring his fatuous nonsense as if in a dream. I could think of nothing else but the despair and misery of these two young people, and of the fatality

which seemed to mix me up in the fatal web which surrounded them. I had had the ring in my keeping. I might have found some excuse, some pretence, for regaining possession of what in reality was more justly my property than Sir Walter's. I might have returned it to Marcel Moreau. How came it that I could speak never a word? How came it that I now remained mute and trembling before my master with that horrid secret in my heart, when a single sentence might have saved us all? But no—there I stood aghast, frozen into silence by the awful complication of events, and with guilty cowardice suffering the stream to flow by while I might have dammed it up with a single word spoken in due season. But the truth is that, so agitated was I that I could scarcely find utterance. The whole thing seemed so monstrous, so entirely beyond belief, that I felt awestruck like one condemned, by a power over which he can have no control, to do the work of Satan. All things seemed to conspire against my revelation of the facts, for just as I was about to put in a feeble argument against the inappropriate use to which Sir Walter meant to apply the ring, Cousin Priscilla entered abruptly. She scowled in most terrible fashion as she observed the jewels on the table, and a gleam from the nether regions shot from her eyes as she said, peevishly:

"Cousin Walter, how can you be fooling away your time with these baubles, when the workmen are dawdling about, waiting for orders concerning those odious iron gates with which it has pleased you to encumber the entrance to the stable-yard? It seems to me that now you have got them, and paid such an awful price for them, like the man with the prize elephant you are dreadfully embarrassed to know what to do with them. Father Raymond swears they shall not go near his chapel, with all those horrid grimacing fiends to frighten poor children away from the altar, and lay foundation for a report among the Protestants that they are our Catholic idols. And really you couldn't have them set up at the entrance to the park—it would seem as if the

road to the Abbey were tabooed, for no one would dare to pass that way after dark; and as to the back entrance giving on to Blatchford woods, none of the grooms would ever dare to bring their horses round that way—the poor animals would take fright at the horrible——"

But Sir Walter did not stay to listen to the end; he was already near the door. The bare mention of the gates had diverted his attention from the jewels, while I stayed behind to lock the boxes up in the *secrétaire*. I looked anxiously about with the hope of finding the ring; but no—it was evident that, while he cared nothing for the priceless rubies of the necklace or the glittering diamonds of the coronet, the ring which was to make his name famous in the annals of the Society had divided his thoughts even with the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul.

CHAPTER IX.

MOONLIGHT MEETING OF THE LOVERS.

No one but myself can ever know what I suffered as the night drew near. We were old-fashioned people at the Abbey, as you may well suppose, and followed the habits of past generations in dining at two o'clock without form or ceremony, servants in undress livery and household plate; tea at six, with hissing urn, buttered toast, sweet cakes and preserves for the ladies, ham, ale and pipes for the gentlemen; supping at nine with all the style and ceremony suited to the state of a nobleman holding a high position in the country—servants in dress livery—the butler and myself in black silk stockings, starched shirt frills and ruffles—and all the ancient plate displayed upon the table. That night the beautiful Marguerite appeared more beautiful than I had yet beheld her. She was more than lovely—she was divine. Sir Walter himself seemed thawed by her beauty, and looked at her now and then with an admira-

tion he sought not to conceal. The Baron de Machecoul raised his eyes at intervals from his bowl of barleymeal porridge—into which his head was always plunged when eating—to gaze upon her with astonishment. Father Raymond once or twice paused in his enjoyment of the roast pig and prune sauce to smile with paternal approbation as his somewhat inquiring glance was directed towards her. And I afterwards learnt that young Surtees, the steward's son, who had been promoted to the supper-table as interpreter to the Baron, declared in the steward's-room that if all the French girls had been like this lovely demoiselle, no power on earth could have brought him back to England, where the women have such thick legs and splay feet; whereupon his father bade him cease his unseemly talk or he would knock him down—the usual threat of father to son in those days, but which I learn has since gone out of fashion. There was no drinking or wassail at Graywood Abbey, and the family and guests all retired as the clock struck ten, for such was the custom. On this particular evening the meal was rather prolonged by reason of the argument which arose concerning the proper position to be assigned to the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul. Sir Walter was of opinion that the entrance to the park from the Monkstone Road would be the fitting place. Father Raymond, who shuddered as he spoke, voted for their being made to replace the turnstile in the wood where the gamekeeper was murdered, declaring that they would be well destined to a place which was already dedicated to Beelzebub. Young Surtees vowed they would produce a fine effect standing alone on the rising ground before the Abbey gates, with an archway decorated with a Gothic pattern of stucco-work to receive them: in France he had seen some beautiful things of the kind in compost, looking quite as well as marble. While Miss Priscilla disapproved of all, and gave as her conviction that they would never be so appropriately placed as they were now, ugly as they were, leaning against the stable wall—out of sight of all but those who chose to hunt after them.

As usual in such cases, the dispute ended exactly at the same point at which it had begun, and they all withdrew heartily tired of the contest.

As soon as the house was quiet and my duty done, I hurried down to the path which led to the Gap. Very different were my feelings to those which had assailed me when at Machecoul. Here I knew every step of the way, and felt no fear or superstitious dread, having for well-nigh twenty years been acquainted with the place without having witnessed the smallest symptom of its being haunted; and I stood at the entrance of the narrow path with a heart disturbed by no other trouble than that of discovery, by the watchful eyes of Miss Priscilla, of the guilty step I was about to undertake. Mademoiselle Marguerite was already there. How she had contrived to escape from her own room, next to that of her jailer, to find her way in the dark, down the great staircase, and let herself out at the hall door, Love, who laughs at locksmiths and never yet was daunted by the impossible, alone can tell. There was a sickly watery moon, for that soft moist air of the morning had brought damp and rain at sunset. But I needed no light, and taking Mademoiselle Marguerite by the hand, we walked at a brisk pace to the bank. As we drew near the spot she quickened her step in spite of the steep ascent, and her breath came shorter and faster with the exertion such haste required. When we had gained the top of the steep clay bank I was fain to lean against a tree for support, while she bent over and looked below; then placing both hands to her mouth, she uttered the old Chouan cry, "twhoo! twoo!" in imitation of the hooting owl by which the chiefs of La Vendée would signal their presence to each other—the cry of which I had heard so much at Machecoul, when the stories of Jean Chouan and Jambe d'Argent would cause the Baron's eyes to flash fire with the memory of the great deeds performed by those peasant heroes of Brittany. She laughed nervously at the start of surprise I could not control, and listened attentively. The cry was repeated from the other side of the

Narrows, and a heavy splash into the water so bold and sudden that the spray flew up to where I stood, then the pawing of a horse's hoof upon the soft turf on our side of the river—and down the maiden sprang, heedless of the slippery ground, the tangled fern, the wet damp clay of the bank; and before I could trace the direction of her flight through the thick underwood I heard her voice on the path below, and the murmuring yet impassioned words of her lover's answer. Few and short they were, but full of hope and comfort, and amid the silence of the night were brought by the breeze straight to my ear: "No, my own love, there is nought to fear. All is ready—well prepared. To-morrow night, to-morrow night . . . ." The great watch-dog at the Bank Edge Farm, some little distance off, had begun to bark at the very first moment of our arrival at the Gap, and his deep-mouthed baying was getting louder and more furious. I knew that Farmer Wicks was vigilant and a terrible foe to the poachers, and began to tremble lest he should take the alarm and come out with his gun and mastiff, as he had done many times before. I called down to Mademoiselle Marguerite to hasten her return, and presently I heard the lovers ascending the bank together. The moon shone out just as they emerged from the dark underwood, and for an instant I could see them both plainly, and I thought that in my whole life I had never beheld a handsomer pair—Monsieur Marcel so tall and dark, Mademoiselle Marguerite so delicate and fair. Both of them bounded up the steep with joyous step, Marcel Moreau bearing the maiden on his arm without appearing to feel the weight. When they had gained the summit, Monsieur Moreau shook me by the hand in a friendly manner.

"I thank you from my soul, Monsieur," said he, "for the aid you have afforded us. You have done a kind and manly act in thus helping to rescue an innocent, timid girl from the horrible fate which was awaiting her." My heart sank within me as he proceeded: "I cannot in honour ask you to assist us, but I think you

deserve to be made the confidant of our flight. To-morrow night I shall come hither to bear away my own sweet Marguerite. The lad at the 'Rose,' where I am staying, is in my confidence; he will lead us along the bank to the corner of the high road, where a post-chaise will be in readiness to convey us to London. He is a clever lad, and will find means to get the horse out of the park without attracting notice. I need not tell you that my first care was to advertise our union at the French Consul's office in London, for I knew I could depend on Marguerite. That formality being accomplished, we have nothing more to dread. You had better not accompany her here to-morrow night. The lad at the 'Rose' will conceal himself in the park before the gates are locked, and will wait at the entrance of the path to lead Mademoiselle de Marsangy down to the river—so that your responsibility will be saved when the inquiry concerning our flight comes to be made. It would not be fair to place you in the unpleasant, nay, dangerous position of having been unfaithful to your master."

I was humbled at the concluding phrase, but scarcely astonished at the distance he thus by a single word sought to place between us, for I saw at a glance, by the long hair he wore falling in thick curls over the collar of his coat, by the high-crowned sugar-loaf hat, the white Robespierre waistcoat, that he belonged to the Republican party just then rising into power in Paris; and I remembered when in that city to have been surprised to observe that the care they always took to place their inferiors in social position at a respectful distance, was much greater than that observed by the nobility whose arrogance they so much condemned.

In a few moments more we were on our road back to the Abbey. My step was heavier by far than when I started; that of my companion, on the contrary, scarcely seemed to touch the ground. She had waited to listen to the splash of the horse back again across the Narrows, and then hurried with precipitate steps down the acclivity. She bore in her hand a long branch of the Spanish broom which grew upon the bank, and

which Marcel had snatched as his horse leaped by. Her arm was passed through mine, but it was I who leaned upon her for support, so entirely unstrung were my nerves by the strange meeting of which I had been the guilty accomplice. I could not sleep—indeed I did not seek it, but opening my window, looked out upon the night. The chamber allotted to Mademoiselle de Marsangy was immediately below my own. She, too, was evidently unable to rest, and I could see the shadow of her form as she leaned over the stone balcony, waving the branch of Spanish broom in the direction of the Narrows, and could hear her murmuring in a sweet, touching tone her thanks for all mercies to the Blessed Mother, in the Litany to the Virgin:

"Regina Cœli,
Stella Maris,
Mater amata,
Rosa mystica."

CHAPTER X.

SIR WALTER'S CUNNING DEVICE.

As was to be expected, the following day was one of storm and tempest. The rain had fallen in torrents as soon as the moon had set, and the wind howled around the old edifice until the walls seemed to totter beneath the efforts of the strong ivy by which they were bound. Sir Walter arose in one of his very worst moods—fretful, peevish, and somewhat abusive of the world in general, and of me in particular. He complained that he had passed a restless night, and was once or twice on the point of ringing me up, for he had fancied he had heard footsteps in the gallery. Nor was his good humour increased when in the midst of his toilet the hard sharp knuckles of Cousin Priscilla were heard rapping in nervous haste upon the door, and her hard sharp voice to utter a peremptory summons to Cousin

Walter to make all the haste he could, for business of the greatest importance was awaiting him downstairs. Sir Walter grew more pettish than ever at the summons. "He hated business in the morning. Cousin Priscilla ought to know it well enough by this time, but some people loved to make a fuss and flurry to disturb people —elderly spinsters in particular." When he had discharged this little eruption of petty spite, he evidently felt relieved enough to bid me go and inquire who it was who had business with him. It was John Grice, the head gamekeeper, who would, however, communicate what he had to tell to Sir Walter only; and the latter, somewhat relieved to find that the business in question could not be very important after all, ordered him to wait, and descended rather more composed to breakfast. The repast was dull and silent enough; the Baron de Machecoul had departed with young Surtees, in spite of wind and weather, soon after five o'clock, on a distant expedition, and the baronet was left alone to entertain his cousin and his affianced bride as best he might. Miss Priscilla's keen grey eyes glared at the fair Marguerite with an expression of ferocity I shall never forget. John Grice was allowed to come in, and his account of the events of the night made my blood tingle.

"Please, your honour, the poachers has been at their old games again. They must have the very devil in 'em, for—would you believe it?—they've actually managed to get across the Narrows, and must ha' snared a heap o' hares among the low wood upon the bank. They must have had the pluck of Old Nick to have crossed the stream, so deep and rapid as it is at that place; but the Gap must clearly have tempted 'em. And, queer enough, my nevvy Jim, who went his rounds before me, at five o'clock in the morning, declares he saw the prints of a horse's hoofs upon the bank. But Lord, your honour, that *must* be a—a—mistake, for not even a poacher would dare to leap over the Narrows on horseback; besides which, none of 'em have got a horse that I know of. Nevvy Jim dearly loves a wonder. I

saw no marks of the kind, but then he says the rain had washed them all away before I came. I can't deny but what the bank has been horribly trampled down; but them poachers ain't in general a light weight, and I suppose, besides, there must have been a rare lot on 'em, and they *must* ha' crossed the Narrows, for the great Spanish broom which grows on the other side, and bends right over the water, is all trampled and trodden down just as if a horse had indeed been ridden over it."

"And see," said Miss Priscilla, suddenly starting up and drawing some object from beneath her shawl, which she flourished in the air and then flung down upon the table with a fiendish grin; "the wind was so high last night that it must have blown this branch of the same Spanish broom all the way from the Narrows to Mademoiselle de Marsangy's balcony."

The Honourable Priscilla's eyes never left gazing on Mdlle. Marguerite, who remained fixed and motionless as if struck by catalepsy. The Honourable Priscilla nodded her head in approbation of the ghastly pallor which had overspread the poor child's countenance, and although I am certain to this day that she knew nothing of the events which were preparing, nor of what had taken place at the Narrows, yet the instinct of evil is so great in some of these children of Satan, of whom she must be the prime and especial favourite, that she felt that there was annoyance to Mdlle. Marguerite in being thus signalled out to notice, and it was a pleasure to see her turn pale and sick, and look as if she were going to faint. Perhaps that was all, for, as I said before, Satan is so full of malicious tricks, that one never can tell with him whether he is in jest or in earnest. Sir Walter meanwhile was practical; he had given up any comprehension of the point of the Honourable Priscilla's action, and as his eggs and ham were getting cold, his coffee tepid, and his toast heavy, he grew impatient at all this trifling, and turning abruptly to John Grice, dismissed him with—

"Very well, then, Grice, we must see about the Gap at once. I could not sleep in my bed if I thought that

poachers were prowling about the Abbey grounds. So you may go, and I will meet you at the Narrows in the course of the day, and we will see to securing the passage for this night at least."

Poor Mdlle. Marguerite could not understand a word of the conversation, and yet she evidently felt so uneasy and oppressed, that, as if moved by instinctive presentiment of misfortune, she grew gradually paler and paler; and after looking piteously around, fixing the same dull heavy gaze on all alike—on Sir Walter, on Priscilla, on the gamekeeper Grice, on myself at last—she slowly arose and moved towards the door. I rushed to save her from falling, for she tottered strangely. But the Honourable Priscilla was not to be despoiled of her prey; she followed on my footsteps.

"Leave her, Lafleur, I command you. Ring the bell for Sarah. She will lead her upstairs to my own room, where I will stay and watch by her the whole day long."

I had to leave her, therefore, sitting in the great hall chair, for my master was already calling me in his usual peevish tones, and Sarah was already helping to loosen the collar and the bosom of the young lady's dress.

"A fainting fit," said Sir Walter, as I re-entered the dining-room. "Poor child! no wonder; as the day approaches she is nervous and excited, no doubt."

"Fool!" exclaimed the Honourable Priscilla, who rushed in hastily just at that moment to fetch a decanter of water from the sideboard—"to be talking of nervous tremors about anything in which *you* are concerned;" and with that she seized the decanter, forgetting the tumbler, and disappeared like a whirlwind as she came. And I remained more disheartened than ever, for the opportunity of saying the word to Mdlle. Marguerite concerning the necessity of communicating to Monsieur Moreau the fact of the probability of the Narrows being watched that night, was lost.

The morning passed away heavily enough. The whole household seemed disjointed and out of tune. Every-

thing seemed given up to confusion and dismay. Sir Walter, having sent for the architect from Monkstone, had, after remaining closeted with him for some time, called for his heavy great-coat, his high-lows and leather overalls, and in spite of wind and weather had gone out in his company. Miss Priscilla was invisible, and Mdlle. Marguerite held close prisoner. My God! shall I ever forget that day? The rain poured in torrents against the latticed windows of the old Abbey; the wind moaned through the long dark passages with melancholy sound, and the finger of Fatality seemed pointed at the household.

Sir Walter did not return till dark. He had sent word that he would take his dinner at the lodge with John Grice, whose dame was the most skilful compounder of hare soup and rabbit stew to be found in the whole county. The Baronet returned splashed and bespattered from head to foot—this was natural enough, considering the muddy state of the woods and fields after a day's violent rain. He was, however, tired to death, worn out with fatigue, which was unusual, but full of satisfaction and in high good humour, which was more unusual still, rubbing his hands and chuckling with glee—a demonstration of inward enjoyment I had never witnessed in him save when he had succeeded in detecting an error in a fellow-antiquary's report, or had triumphed in some knotty question of date or place, the object of debate at a meeting of the Society. I ought to have been pleased to see this change in the humour which needed it so much. Why was it then that, instead of being satisfied at beholding it, I grew more and more disquieted and uneasy? He was so lighthearted that he even condescended to jest with me as I helped him to dress for supper. "You may well look ashamed at those galigaskins, Lafleur," said he. "Lucky it is for you that you have not got to brush them;—just look, mud and mortar an inch thick. Positively I have been at work the whole day like a journeyman bricklayer—but I was forced to help in spite of myself when I beheld the awkward manner in which

their delicate workmanship was exposed in the hands of those sottish clowns from the stoneyard at Monkstone. I do assure you, Lafleur, that once or twice the tears ran down my cheeks to behold the rough manner in which the treasure was handled."

"But, pardon me, Sir Walter, of what treasure are you speaking?" What with his excitement, and what with the effort of stooping, which was beginning to grow painful to me, I had become so nervous that I scarcely knew what I was saying nor why I was asking.

"Why of what *should* I be speaking, but of the Great Iron Gates, to be sure?"

I must confess that the answer brought great relief, for my heart was so full of doubt and fear with regard to the issue of the adventure in which I had embarked for that night, that I cared not one dump what became of the horrible Iron Gates of Machecoul, of which my very soul was sick, and would not have experienced the smallest emotion had I been informed by Sir Walter that their final destination was to be the Abbey roof itself, but he went on:

"Well then, Lafleur, since you are in all my secrets, I may tell you that I have found a place at last for the Great Iron Gates—a most convenient, right, and proper place, and I really wonder that I never thought of it before. But, thank Heaven, the iron stanchions are as safely imbedded in the old boundary-wall of the Abbey as ever they could have been in the good monks' time. By the way, Lafleur, that wall must have been built with part of the old Roman wall which runs along the river. Those monks were clever fellows—the stones are bound together in a fashion that, with all our modern skill, we should be unable to imitate; and now they stand firm against wind and storm, firm as the wall itself, serving the double purpose of glorifying the already glorious view from the hill on the western bank of the river, and of closing the Gap at the Narrows without closing it on our side.

"The Narrows?" Sir Walter, exclaimed I, faintly.

"Yes! the Narrows, the Narrows—what of that, Lafleur? One would think you had an interest in the sale of the hares and pheasants snared by the poachers, who, according to Grice's account, enter the Gap at midnight and tread down the bank so that it will give way one of these days—to say nothing of the destruction of the game, about which I care but little, and the damage which may occur to the Druid stone by their bivouacking in its shelter. Good heavens! now I think of it, what have I not been risking all this while! They might have lighted a fire at its base and destroyed every one of those strange characters carved thereon—characters so ancient, Lafleur, that no man living can even tell their date, much less in what language they are graven."

And at the very thought of such a catastrophe, Sir Walter rose abruptly and paced the room in an excited manner; whilst I sank against the chair he had quitted, hiding my face to conceal the agony which I knew too well was displayed there.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CRASH AT THE GATES.

It was fortunate that the supper-bell, ringing its loud clang just at that minute, made Sir Walter start and hurry back to his seat, and I hastened about my duties with hands trembling all the while as if with palsy; and my speech, in answer to his questions, came so thick and hoarse, that he asked me rudely whether I had been drinking to keep out the damp of that raw day, and then added: "That, you know, is an amicable jest, Lafleur—never mind it; but one thing I want you to observe—say not a word about the Gap. I wish to surprise the ladies. It will be a charming thing to take them some fine morning down to the Narrows and enjoy their delight when they behold the fine effect

produced by the Iron Gates." With this he descended to the supper-room, and soon I heard his cracked voice in full career of a long-winded story about his adventures in the building line, and the mud upon his galigaskins and the mortar on his thick Bluchers.

The trouble on my mind grew more and more terrible as the supper proceeded. I knew not how to communicate the danger to Monsieur Moreau, nor yet to apprise Mademoiselle Marguerite of the unavoidable postponement of her flight. My heart sank within me with a strange foreboding of evil, when on going out of the supper-room I met pretty Sarah, the housemaid, with a face all swollen and red with weeping. She rushed hurriedly past me without pausing to notice my efforts at condolence, but pushed me rudely aside, sobbing as if her heart would break, and exclaiming hysterically: "Let me go! Let me go, for mercy's sake. Oh, what will poor mother say? Oh, my poor Ned! so good, so honest. Oh dear, oh dear!" Now I knew that it was Sarah's young brother, Ned, who was the lad at the "Rose," and in my mind I could not help connecting Sarah's agitation with some accident which had befallen him, and I rushed back to my post in the supper-room full of the most horrible forebodings and impressed with the idea of some dreadful catastrophe about to happen. The very atmosphere seemed to be growing redolent of misfortune; for on the threshold I met old Grice coming across the hall in high glee.

"We've got 'un, we've got 'un!" exclaimed he, grinning from ear to ear; "I've just come in to let master know. But Lord, who'd ha' thought it? Young Ned, the lad at the 'Rose.' It's him has been a-poachin' all this time. We cotched him down by the Narrows, and oh Lord! warn't he took aback when he seed them gates that master had been a-puttin' up to day? And we've been an' lodged him in the Cage, and there he is a layin' on the ground, 'owlin' and ravin' like mad, talkin' a lot of rubbish about a young gentleman at the Gap and a young lady at the

Abbey, just to make us think him gone crazy; but 'twon't do—we old birds ain't a goin' to be caught with chaff by young 'uns of his sort."

And thereupon he hurried away to the ale and gossip of the servants' hall, leaving me to the despair his words had brought.

When I re-entered, Sir Walter was still proceeding with his pottering narrative. I looked intently at Mademoiselle Marguerite as I moved to and fro, never taking my eyes from her countenance, for I had heard that this perseverance never failed to attract the answering glance of the person so gazed at. But I fancy that youth on both sides must be the condition of success, for it was only a frightened look she now and then turned towards me, evidently unconscious of the direction in which she was gazing, and with a mind wandering far away from the scene which was going on before her. I lingered around the table until I could linger no longer, and then roamed about the passages leading to the room occupied by Mademoiselle Marguerite, hoping to intercept her on her way thither. But as misfortune had predetermined, she came accompanied by the Baron de Machecoul, to whose arm she was clinging with unwonted tenderness, and at the door of her room she kissed him fondly, and begged his benediction—which he gave her earnestly, with something of surprise at the request. Then she closed her door, and I hid myself while the Baron passed by, returning to Mademoiselle de Marsangy's room when I had heard his door close and his heavy boots thrown with a boisterous clang upon the floor. I almost crawled upon my hands and knees to Mademoiselle Marguerite's door, so low did I bend, so closely did I follow the wall for fear of discovery. I had resolved to pass a scrap of paper, on which I had written a few words to say that an unforeseen accident would prevent the realization of the plan of that night, and that I was about to hasten down to the Gap to apprise Monsieur Moreau of what had occurred. But as I stooped to pass the paper under the door, I heard voices within. Miss Priscilla

had evidently been inspired by the demon with a sudden impression of something strange in the young lady's appearance, which connecting with her indisposition of that morning, she was insisting on the young lady going to bed that instant, and first of all taking a soothing draught of her own compounding, from a recipe of the great Dr. Buchan, which never failed to bring calm and repose to the most nervous frame. And then I heard her say:

"You are not well, my dear young cousin; you are evidently suffering from the over-excitement of this trying time. Here, take this—it will do you good and send you into a quiet sleep, and I will stay with you till I see you slumbering calmly on your pillow. Three days hence, my dear cousin—only three days more—and I shall be quite debarred the pleasure of watching by your side."

The words were kind enough, but spoken with such hate and venom in the tone, that one would almost have thought they were uttered with malice, instead of the commonplace attention they conveyed. I could not communicate with Mademoiselle Marguerite, but there was great consolation in the idea that she was prevented from leaving the Abbey.

When all was quiet, I stole out into the park. The sky was very dark. Not even the pale watery moon of the night before was visible on the horizon, the fact of her presence behind the clouds being only made manifest by the kind of grey twilight which appears now and then, showing the place where she hides, and lightening the sky for a moment sufficiently to distinguish any object near at hand. By this dim suspicious light I could barely discern my way between the trees, scarcely enough indeed to avoid the hillocks which Sir Walter loved to see rising above the ground in the park—they reminded him of the barrows of the ancient Britons—and the huge grey stones which he had distributed here and there to coincide with the antique appearance of everything about the place. The wind had risen, moreover, and the branches tossed to and fro with that mysterious confusion of sounds which contributes so cruelly to the

feeling of superstitious awe with which men, even of the stoutest nerves, are assailed when wandering amongst lofty trees in the dark. Now and then I could hear the plashing of the river in the distance, and my haste was increased when I thought how angry grew the Narrows when the south-west wind became engulfed between the banks. I remembered the raging of the rapid stream when it tossed over the stones and threw its white foam high above the banks, and trembled to reflect that in spite of the insignificance of its appearance when calm, no man on earth could resist its current when it was lashing itself into fury as it must be doing at this moment. And then I remembered too the approaching hour, and with such a shock of terror that I sprang forward and ran at full speed until stopped by the tangled underwood, and forced to pick my way back again into the straight path. Now I must have made a long circuit—or was it that the time seemed endless through impatience? but when I emerged from the cross cut, I found myself not more than half-way down the descent. The dim light just then thrown by the moon from behind the vapoury clouds, enabled me to catch glimpses of the river shooting by with sudden flashes like lightning, and tossing and tumbling with the power and velocity of a torrent five hundred feet high; and at the sight I sprang forward with all the speed I could command, shouting as I tore along, forgetful that I was not only expending breath in vain efforts, but exhausting my muscular power into the bargain.

And presently the whole view of the Narrows lay before me—but oh, my God! seen through the fiendish tracing of the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul, now filling the space where had been the Gap! Heaven knows I have no pretension to any knowledge of art, but a moment's reflection sufficed to assure me that if the river and the shoal lay in the light, the Gap and the Gates must be dark from the other side. The thought drove me to distraction, and I stamped and raved like a lunatic, and at last fell upon my knees on the bare earth, all wet and soddened as it was, and breathed forth a fervent prayer for

mercy — for — at last — yes — my ear, sharpened by terror and anxiety, had become dimly sensible of the sound of a horse's hoofs at full gallop on the opposite side, and drawing near to the Narrows. I clambered, I know not how, to the top of the bank, holding on by the clump of willows that hung over the stream. I could discern, dimly, it is true, and only at intervals, a dark moving mass approaching the Narrows. I tried to shout like a man—but my lungs refused their office. I made an effort to scream like a woman—but my voice died away in my throat. I waved my hat high in the air—but it fell from my trembling grasp into the bushes at my feet. For a moment I beheld nought below me, the darkness was so great. For a moment there was silence deep as death all around me where I stood, while the hissing rush of the river seemed hushed as it were, for, as Heaven is my judge, I distinctly heard—it could not have been fancy—the word of encouragement spoken to the panting steed, uttered in a joyous tone—then—one flourish of the whip—one ringing stroke of the curb against the bit, and—oh, merciful God! can the memory of that moment ever be effaced?—a tremendous crash—a clang loud and discordant as the tocsin in the burning city, and then an awful shriek—a cry unlike any other—not of this world; that cry—half guttural groan, half piercing scream—that cry the headsman tells us can be uttered but once by the same human voice, burst upon the silence—and then a furious plunge—a tremendous splash;—the faint snort of the drowning steed as he was borne rapidly along by the rushing water;—and then—why then nothing more — nothing — silence deep as before — nay, deeper still it seemed to me, for to the excitement of that unearthly watch had succeeded the mute and hopeless stillness of despair! How I stumbled down the bank to the spot where the awful catastrophe had taken place, I know not—indeed I have no memory of my own feelings at the time, so frozen and benumbed was every faculty by the horror of that moment. I

called again, I clapped my hands once more, I screamed and shouted, for my voice was unlocked now — but no answer save the echo of those sounds, mingling with the eternal, never ceasing roaring of the Narrows, met my ear. I shook the Iron Gates with all my might, and uttered a deep and heartfelt curse upon them, but the same melancholy clang I had already heard at Machecoul was the sole response.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SLEEPING DRAUGHT—THE DEATH SLUMBER—THE DAWN OF THE DAY AT GRAYWOOD ABBEY.

AND then—ay then—what was to be done? What was I to do? Sole witness of the catastrophe, with none to assist and none to advise, I felt more helpless than an infant; and after remaining for a few moments in deep thought, with a thousand conflicting ideas chasing each other through my brain, I slunk from the spot like one who has committed some frightful crime, awe-struck and subdued by the sentence of Heaven which had condemned me to such a fate. I felt that the only duty now left to be accomplished was to save the poor victim at the Abbey from a knowledge of what had passed. To account for the lover's delay would already be difficult; but for his total disappearance—impossible. My brain was tossed to and fro as in a seething caldron at beholding the awful task before me. With slow and solemn pace I re-trod the path homewards. My head was bowed almost to the very ground, entirely absorbed with the idea of the strange position in which I had been placed, when I was startled by hearing a footstep rustling through the ferns, and I became aware of the presence of some one close beside me. At that moment my soul was full of terror, and it cannot create wonder that a superstitious fear should have seized upon me as I recalled those footsteps at Machecoul which would

never more be heard upon this earth. But a little hand, warm and soft, was laid upon my arm, and a low sweet voice whispered into my ear:

"Hush! be not alarmed, Lafleur. It is I—Marguerite de Marsangy. I am later than I ought to be. But if you only knew the trouble I have had to get here at all! I knew you would come to say farewell. You have been our only friend all through, and may every blessing attend you for your kindness. You are the cause of all my happiness. I shall owe it all to you." And the poor thing stroked my hand and raised it to her lips so like the innocent caress of a child. "Oh, and then, such a difficulty I had to escape to-night. I was drugged with a nauseous draught of Miss Priscilla's own compounding—and watched; so was forced to feign sleep in order to get rid of those terrible eyes—which have never ceased to watch and trouble me ever since they first flashed upon me, seeming to search my soul, on my arrival here. But I managed to deceive even that searching gaze, and flinched not even when the light was held close to my face. And no sooner was my jailer gone than I escaped from the room, scarcely taking time to hurry on my dress. And then when I got to the Druid's Stone I felt fit to die with the disappointment. No one was there to meet me! The lad at the 'Rose' must have grown weary of waiting, and has no doubt gone on to the Gap. But tell me, Lafleur—is he here? Have you seen him? Perhaps he is angry at my delay. He had sent you to search for me, no doubt. Kind Lafleur! my only friend—how I wish you were going with us, leaving this dreadful place for ever."

The blue light seen through the opening in the trees, just then made her form visible enough for me to discern the small white parcel she carried in her hand. With the instinct of my calling, I attempted to ease her of her burthen. But she grasped it tightly.

"It is all I have brought," said she. "It is light enough—only my book of prayers, the ritual of our Convent, which I have vowed to read each day, and my veil of pupil postulante, which you know is considered holy,

and is kept as a sacred relic to the end of life. I sealed up the jewels Sir Walter kindly sent me yesterday, with everything else that he had ever given me, and left them on my toilet with a note to him—which I left open that Priscilla might read it when she returned—begging his forgiveness, and explaining how long and how truly I had loved Marcel Moreau, owning how wicked I had been in keeping my feelings secret from him, and telling him—what is God's holy truth—that I should have confessed all, had it not have been for the threat of malediction held out by my uncle.—But come, whither are we hurrying so fast? Surely we are retracing our steps back to the Abbey! It is dark, to be sure, but the light which guides me to the Narrows is in my heart, and I can see the road as plainly as at noon. My feet would follow by instinct to the place where Marcel is waiting for me—and, I fear, with terrible impatience."

She laughed softly at the idea, while my soul was wrung with such despair that I could hardly move a step, and the cold perspiration stood upon my forehead, while my bosom laboured with emotion. She rallied me on my lagging pace, and tried almost playfully to drag me forward. I felt as if my heart were breaking for her sake, and I remained speechless for mere want of decision as to what I ought to say. She noticed this silence at length, and grew impatient.

"Why do you not speak, Lafleur? Something is the matter. Tell me at once. He has been to the Gap, and gone away in anger. Is it not so? But the fault is not mine, Lafleur. Oh, let me run and tell him all that I have undergone!"

She started forward a few paces, and then laid her hand upon her heart.

"How strange! I cannot move quickly," said she. "I feel as though a heavy weight were laid upon my brain."

With a horrible pang I thought of Priscilla's composing draught, and knew the consequence of this excitement. I was obliged to speak out at length:

"My dear young lady, it is useless to proceed further—

the scheme is given up for to-night. To-morrow I will explain all. A watch has been set at the Narrows. The lad at the 'Rose' has been captured by a mistake, and Monsieur Marcel——"

"Well—quick! quick! tell me what he said—what he did. Where is he gone?"

"Wait till to-morrow, dear Mademoiselle, and I will tell you. He was compelled to desist. The night is so black and wild—and see, even now the rain is beginning to fall once more. Let us hasten back to the Abbey. I will protect you through the passages to your room."

"Oh!—no, no, no! never more will I return thither," she shrieked, with an outburst of passion of which I should never have deemed her capable. Then peremptorily stepping forward, "Lead me to Marcel—he *must* have told you where he lodges in the village. Let us go at once. Better to bear the rain than seek shelter beneath the roof of Graywood Abbey."

My perplexity now became terrible. There was but one issue to the dilemma.

"You will catch your death of cold, dear Mademoiselle. Come with me, then, to some temporary refuge from the storm. There is a hut close by, where the deer-keeper watches alone. We had better hurry thither for shelter. See how the rain is coming down! —and at daylight we can decide on what had best be done."

The argument admitted of no objection, for in reality the rain was now beginning to pour in torrents, and the wind to roar through the trees. I roused the deer-keeper, who, fortunately stupid enough to accept my explanation of the young lady having lost her way and been benighted on her return from the Chapel of the Virgin at Ferny Glade, and indeed too stupid to see anything extraordinary in anything, left his wooden hut at once, grinning with delight at the little gratuity I slid into his hand. Mademoiselle Marguerite, pale as a winding-sheet, and with a singular expression in her eyes, dilated as they were to their utmost size, yet lacking all light and lustre, sank upon the low pallet

without a word, without a murmur, and before I had reached the door had fallen into a slumber apparently as sound as that of the grave. The reaction to the great excitement she had undergone, added to the physical fatigue and the latent effect of Miss Priscilla's composing draught—all of which she had resisted literally unto death—had at last done their work, and she could resist no longer.

At another time I might have felt a strange disquietude at this insensibility; but at the moment it was a relief, as it enabled me to quit the hut—which I did at once, locking the door behind me, and bearing away the key.

I ran as if for my very life across the park, with a strange kind of idea in my head of finding some means of gaining access to Mademoiselle Marguerite's chamber, and concealing the letter she had left open on the table for Sir Walter. All was still and quiet through the mansion as I entered; the dark glimmer of the pale hall-lamp was just beginning to struggle with the first melancholy light of dawn. I stole up the stair with the softest step I could command, and had just reached the painted gallery, at the end of which the poor young lady's chamber was situated, when, to my horror and dismay, the door was burst open with a violent effort, and out rushed a figure attired in a loose bed-wrapper, the long streamers of her nightcap floating behind, the arms thrown wildly aloft. It was Miss Priscilla, who had just issued from Mademoiselle Marguerite's room; and by the stream of light thrown upon the wall from the taper within, I could discern that she was holding aloft the note left open on the table by poor Marguerite.

As she flew by, her screech-owl voice was raised to its highest pitch, and before I could arrest her progress she had darted to Sir Walter's door, and began thundering against the panels: "Cousin Walter! Cousin Walter! wake up! arise! there is treason in the house! Your pretty bird has flown away! Your beautiful French bride, forsooth—Marguerite—has fled

disgracefully; and you will be, as you deserve to be, the laughing-stock of the whole country round!"

It was with absolute despair I heard Sir Walter struggling about for his slippers, after ringing his bell loud and long for me, which was his usual habit whenever any sudden trouble came upon him. I seized Miss Priscilla by the arm, imploring her to desist. "Pray be silent!" exclaimed I, in agony; "this is all a mistake. Oh pray, for mercy's sake, do not rouse the servants! I can explain all."

A louder scream from the lips of Miss Priscilla, who was evidently afraid that the assertion might be true, was followed by the creaking of many doors in the distance, and the hum of many voices, all demanding in the same frightened tone what was the matter; and all my efforts to prevent her from proclaiming the sad event to the household were fruitless. And now the servants came hurrying from all parts of the house, and the Baron, slipshod with his braces hanging down behind him, and last of all Sir Walter himself, peevishly, as was his wont, calling for Lafleur, filled the corridor; while Miss Priscilla, evidently bent on giving publicity to the family disgrace, still kept on her clamouring with redoubled vigour, addressing herself to each in turn.

"Cousin Walter, where is your fair young bride, who was to have made your home so happy, and brought back your youth once more?" And then turning from Sir Walter's bewildered look of inquiry to the Baron, she exclaimed, forgetting that he could not understand a word of English: "And Monsieur le Baron, where is the sweet, innocent lamb, fresh from the Convent of the Visitation? Your lamb has left the fold; but do not fear, she has not gone alone. She has found—protection. And Cousin Walter, see the narrow escape you have had. If she could deceive you so well in her maiden innocence, and you thrice her age, what could she not have done in her matronly experience? She has gone off with her lover—she says so in this note she left open on her dressing-table

for all the world to read—the young artist, the very same Marcel Moreau who first drew the accursed Iron Gates of Machecoul——"

"Excuse me, Miss Jarvis, you are wrongly informed," I interposed. "I assure you the thing is all a mistake, and I can satisfactorily explain the disappearance of Mademoiselle de Marsangy. I sat up very late, and just as I was about to retire to bed I fancied that I heard a moaning voice beneath my window. I looked out into the park and perceived a figure crossing to the wood. I hastily descended and pursued the form, which proved to be that of Mademoiselle Marguerite. She was wet through. She was evidently in a state of high excitement, and told me you had given her a potion to make her sleep—instead of which it had mounted to her brain. It must have been while under its influence that she wrote that letter and left the house, for she allowed me without the smallest resistance to conduct her to the deer-keeper's hut, where she is now lying fast asleep, having yielded to the slumber which has followed the terrible excitement consequent on the draught you had administered. Here is the key of the hut which I have brought away with me, having only just left the poor young lady to procure assistance to bring her back. Somebody must run and fetch the doctor—for her state, I know, is one of the greatest danger."

I held up the great clumsy key as I spoke. The evidence was conclusive. It left no excuse for doubting the facts, and Sir Walter, who had not understood the drift of the accusation, looked immensely relieved although he understood not a whit more of the justification; but tying his silk handkerchief tighter under his chin, he slunk back again into his room to avoid the current of air which was keenly felt in the gallery.

The Baron, understanding nothing either, and used to what he called "*les frimes des femmes*," thinking all the while—as he afterwards told me—that Miss Priscilla had been merely recounting a bad dream which had

disturbed her, and that somehow I had been a comfort to her under the trial, exclaimed, "*Brave garçon!*" and also withdrew into his chamber to finish his toilet, in order to fulfil the promise made to young Surtees, he evening before, of meeting him at the five-acre field by five o'clock.

And Miss Priscilla remained alone to give her orders to the servants. This she did with eagerness, ordering the carriage to be got in readiness immediately, and she would herself go and fetch Mademoiselle Marguerite from the deer-keeper's hut. Perhaps she doubted the truth of my story, or perhaps she was alarmed at what might be the consequence of the discovery which must be made concerning the medicine she had given her.

We found the poor maiden exactly as I had left her, stretched upon the straw in a state more resembling lethargy than sleep. I had succeeded in frightening Miss Priscilla into silence on the subject of the strange story I had told, and she durst not utter a word of doubt or suspicion concerning it. The poor girl was removed from the hut without being disturbed from the deep unearthly slumber into which she had been thrown, and as I gazed into her death-pale face and contracted brow, I almost wished she might never waken.

Miss Priscilla grew more and more alarmed at beholding the change which had come over her. She bade me, in a whisper, send a groom to Blatchford for Dr. Milner, her own physician, and not for Dr. Challoner at Monkstone, Cousin Walter's pet.

I was glad of the errand, and, after giving my directions to the groom, I ran to the Narrows before anybody else had been to visit the scene of the past night's horrible disaster.

The dawn had arisen by this time, and I now could see my way plainly through the wood and between the high embankments. I ran wildly down the precipitate path towards the Gap, and almost as swiftly up the steep ascent at the bottom of which flowed the Narrows. I bent my head as I drew near, for I felt as if

I never more should dare to face the day. I paused before I ventured to climb the bank, and as I did so I heard my name shouted forth in accents of alarm. I looked up whence the sound proceeded, and saw to my dismay the sturdy figure of the Baron de Machecoul, standing out in strong relief against the orange-tinted sky, his arms thrown above his head and beckoning to me in wildest excitement; and as I clambered up to where he stood, the fatal Iron Gates, lighted up by the rising sun and seeming to mock me with their fiendish animation, met my gaze. The morning beams caught with sparkling light the salient portions of the work, some of them worn bright and polished with age, while others still retained a portion of their ancient gilding: and the fiends pursuing and the souls pursued cast their shadows on the grass, which rose and sank shivering as the wind passed over it. The Sabbath dance seemed to have begun with just the same wizard fascination as beneath the moonlight at Machecoul.

Young Surtees stood leaning against the great oak-tree where poor Marguerite and her lover had so lately stood, laying their plans for happiness far away from Graystone Abbey; his face was white as ashes, and his eyes were wildly staring down the rushing waters of the Narrows.

"Look here, look here, Lafleur!" said he, trembling from head to foot, "one would think that murder had been committed at the Gap. Just see! there is a pool of blood."

I shuddered as the quivering light glided from the little pool and danced red upon the clear waters all round; and my heart was sick as I beheld the broad, dark stains gathered round each stone, and which were being carried away in crimson bubbles on the surface of the pure white foam.

"The Baron and I were crossing the five-acre field down to the river about half a mile from here," said young Surtees, "when we noticed a dark object rising and falling on the top of the stream. It was the carcase of a horse, whose progress was impeded by the

Great Boulder Stone. The poor animal must have smashed his skull against a tree, for we followed the track of blood curling in little eddies amongst the stones, or lying in pools amongst the grass and flowers of the bank, all the way back to this place—where it is plain the catastrophe must have occurred, for here is every sign of the death-struggle. And now there is the horse, but where is the rider? Let us hope that he had been thrown long before the brute had dashed his skull against the Iron Gates, for such a death must be an awful one."

While he had been speaking I had descended, although but slowly, the perilous path to the river side, and stood by the Iron Gates. Just as I drew near, the wind arose with mournful sound and passed through the slender, closely-woven tracery, which sent forth a mournful vibration like the sounds of the Æolian harp. It was evident they had been tried by some violent shock, for at one part the work was slightly bent; and as I drew near and laid my forehead against the bars, something warm and moist came creeping over my cheek. I raised my hand to brush it away. It was a long lock of coal-black hair, which had got somehow twisted and entangled round the jutting horns of the identical fiend whence I had drawn the affianced ring of Marguerite de Marsangy. I tore it away with a cry of horror, and hid it in my bosom. I could bear no more, but ran homeward, forgetful of all but the terrible sequel to the love adventure in which I had borne a part.

But the news which greeted me at the hall door showed me plainly enough that my sufferings were not yet at an end. After Miss Priscilla's doctor from Blatchford had declared the young lady's case to be one of extreme danger, Sir Walter's own doctor from Monkstone had been sent for, and he declared the danger to be not only extreme but immediate. Resistance to the effects of Miss Priscilla's sleeping potion, through excitement of unearthly power, exposure to the cold and wet of that stormy night, had

proved too much for the young lady's vital strength, and nature had given way beneath the strain.

The gigantic efforts made by Dr. Challoner to restore activity to the brain were answered but once, when she began a long, low murmuring recapitulation of the whole scene of the previous night, telling in broken whispers of the love and truth, and of the hope of being far away before the dawn; then gradually the whispering became fainter and more faint, until the motion of the pale lips alone showed that her mind was still dwelling on the picture of happiness she had fancied to be in store for her future life.

She expired with a faint smile, exclaiming quite intelligibly, "*Cher Marcel! Enfin te voilà!*"

Dr. Challoner, "in order to satisfy the feelings of the family" he said afterwards, took the trouble to analyze what remained of Miss Priscilla's composing draught. It was found to be compounded according to Dr. Buchan's recipe, and the poor frightened spinster was therefore exonerated from all share in Marguerite's untimely death.

I had loved the beautiful orphan with a tenderness born of admiration and compassion, but nevertheless could not bring myself to mourn her death. She died before the discovery of poor Marcel's mangled and mutilated corpse miles and miles away down the stream. The countenance, crushed out of all human semblance against the iron spikes of the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul, prevented any attempt at identification; and at the hurried inquest which took place upon the body a verdict of "Found Drowned" was returned—a circumstance of which I knew nothing till long after the body had been buried in a pauper's grave in the parish of Northington, full fifteen miles away down the river.

The landlord of the "White Hart Family Hotel" at Blatchford was easily persuaded by me that the hire of the post-chaise was nothing more than a hoax on the part of Ned Willis, in fulfilment of a foolish wager; and as I consented to pay all expenses incidental to

the ill-timed jest, no further notice was taken of the occurrence.

As for poor Ned Willis himself, he grew so bewildered and perplexed by all that had taken place, that he left the country and enlisted for a soldier. The Baron de Machecoul, while mourning with becoming decency the loss of his lovely relative who lies buried in the chancel of Graywood Chapel, and declaring that England had grown odious to him after her death, would not leave its melancholy shores notwithstanding, until the money for the gates had been duly paid in golden coin—which he cunningly sewed up with his own hands into a multitude of little bags he had manufactured, and distributed in all kinds of secret places in his trunk, and stitched in the leather belt he wore round his person. He went back to Machecoul, and, aided by young Surtees, who accompanied him, has so much improved the estate with the money and experience obtained from England, that he has grown rich and prosperous enough to produce barley crops fit to rival those of the Fathers of Saint Benedict—the only object for which he has lived for many years past.

CHAPTER XIII.

FALL OF THE GATES OF MACHECOUL.

Sir Walter, whose nerves had been nursed and fondled into an unnaturally weak, uncertain state, could not sustain the shock of the publicity which was of necessity given to these events throughout the county. From the day of poor Marguerite's funeral he never once left the Abbey grounds, and before the year was out my functions about his person became increased by the task of following the Bath-chair in which the head page would have to draw him through the park, on fine afternoons, to the place where he could obtain a view of the Iron Gates of Machecoul. By and

by, when the ride became too much for him, he ordered the gates to be removed and brought nearer to the house, and they were set up on the summit of the mound close to the Druid's Stone. The sight of them had become the one sole enjoyment of his dreary existence, and he would order the page to drag him to the spot, and there remain leaning back upon the cushions, gazing dreamily upon them for hours, murmuring and dribbling out incoherent words—while the iron fiends, always active and vigorous as ever, would seem to mock his helpless state as their Sabbath dance went on. But Sir Walter, amid all his troubles and even his growing imbecility, had not forgotten the bridal ring. He wore it on his little finger, and all the while he talked to the ever-restless demons on the Iron Gates of Machecoul he would twirl it round and round with his poor numbed and stiffened fingers, now grown so hard and dry that the golden circle rattled beneath his touch as though he had been telling the beads of his rosary. One day, although the wind was high, and the grass upon the lawn, which had remained neglected and uncut for some time, was rising and falling in billows like the raging sea, and the trees which bordered the avenue were tossing their branches in wild tumult against the stormy sky, Sir Walter, who had remained the whole morning gazing wistfully towards the Iron Gates, ordered out the Bath chair to take his usual ride. I remonstrated, but in vain. He was obstinate and inexorable, and the shrill screaming tones in which his half-formed words were uttered were heard even above the roaring wind and the rustling of the branches. I sent secretly for Dr. Challoner, whose will was law at the Abbey, and meanwhile endeavoured to delay as much as I could the expedition on which my master was bent. We moved slowly enough, in all conscience, across the lawn, the Bath-chair labouring and creaking over the hillocks, the leather hood offering strenuous resistance to the wind. Arrived at our usual place of vantage, I proceeded to begin my usual sickening task of reading, from the manuscript he had written for the Society, the

description of the Great Iron Gates which was to have brought him renown amongst all the *savans* of Europe, when, on looking up, I was seized with a sudden panic, for I was sure that I beheld the Iron Gates vibrate and sway two and fro each time a strong gust, passing over them, whistled through the finer portion of the work in a tone sharp and shrill as a scream of pain. I was just about to insist upon withdrawing Sir Walter from the too near vicinity of the mound, when a loud call from the Abbey door arrested the intention. It was Doctor Challoner, running all breathless and angry towards us.

"Back to the house this instant," exclaimed he. "Is this a day for a patient to be out of doors? This nor'-east wind is enough to kill your master on the spot."

I rushed forward to help to push the vehicle more quickly towards the Abbey, when a gust of wind, more fierce and terrible than any which had preceded it, blew straight upon the Iron Gates. Too heavy for the foundation which had been run up hastily to receive them, they resisted not the shock, and with a tremendous crash they toppled down, bringing with them a cloud of stones and mortar which was scattered on the grass all around. At first it was thought that no one was the worse for the accident—even Sir Walter, who remained sitting upright in the chair, staring with wide-open eyes upon the ruin. We all gathered round the helpless one, but he spoke not, nor did he move his hand in token of recognition of our inquiry. I observed the doctor change colour as he looked into the lack-lustre eyes of his patient, and signed to us to hurry back to the house.

"Is this another attack?" said I, in a whisper.

"It is death!" replied the doctor, in a faint voice, motioning me to silence.

We laid Sir Walter down upon the sofa in the library, from whence he was removed but to be carried to the family vault under the chapel in the park. Not a trace of any wound or injury could be found, but the shock to the nervous system had been sufficient to extinguish

the small remnant of life that remained. Upon the mat upon which Sir Walter's feet had rested was found the flat gold ring, which had fallen from his finger on its relaxing at the moment of death. I asked the doctor at once if he thought I might keep it as a souvenir of my master.

"Certainly, Lafleur, and I will be answerable for its disposal. It is evidently of no value whatever—the whim of an old maniac. Take it, Lafleur, without hesitation. It is a modest request indeed, after twenty years' faithful service."

That very afternoon I went alone to the Gap, and dropped it into the rushing waters of the Narrows, and watched it as it whirled along—following the current down which poor Marcel's shattered form must have been carried, far away to Northington parish, fifteen miles down the river.

Of all the curses wrought by the Great Iron Gates, none have fallen with more bitterness than that which struck the Honourable Priscilla Jarvis. She had never been a favourite amongst the people around Graywood, and as the first symptom of the disease which attacked Sir Walter after the shock given to his frame by the death of Mademoiselle Marguerite happened to be the inveterate dislike he took to the unlucky spinster's presence, it became rumoured in the place that the beautiful young lady from France had been poisoned by Sir Walter's own cousin. Whenever poor Priscilla appeared in the village, she was assailed by groans and hisses and spiteful inquiries as to what she had done with the lovely French girl—so that she dared not venture beyond the park gates, and wandered about the place grieved and solitary, as she deserved to be, until, at Sir Walter's death, she resolved to enter the convent at New Hall, where she became anything but a blessing to the community.

Conclusion.

My story was finished, as I thought. But I reopen my manuscript to relate the last malicious trick played by the Demon of the Iron Gates. As I sat at the window gazing on the spot where the Great Iron Gates of Machecoul had lain for so many years, rusting and rotting, as they fell—the sharp pointed work sinking deeper and deeper into the soil with each rainy season, the long rank grass growing in ragged tufts and patches between the open work of the complicated pattern — I mused over the events I had been recording, and thought of them all with the softened regret which has long since taken place of the sombre despair which had assailed me at first after their occurrence. I was startled by the sight of the lodge-keeper beckoning me to come down quickly. Dreadful news from Blatchford had just been brought to the lodge. Old Stiff, always miserly and mean in his transactions, had refused to pay the proper number of men to load the Iron Gates on to the barge waiting in the canal at Blatchford wharf; and, to save the expense of a workman, had insisted on helping the labour himself. The Iron Gates, imperfectly balanced, had left the cart too rapidly, and had slidden down to the canal, where they had sunk at once like a lump of rock, crushing old Stiff beneath their weight and seriously injuring one of the wharf porters, who had just been carried to the hospital, with little hope of recovery.

This last event, which has moved all Blatchford, is attributed to insufficient care on the part of the wharf porters. But I know better. It is the last malignant act of the Demon who presided over the construction of

The Great Iron Gates of Machecoul.

THE END.

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TO STOUT PEOPLE.

OBESITY & ITS CURE.

The following recent Extract from the *Bradford Daily Telegraph* will be of interest to those suffering from obesity:—

"Want of space will not permit us to enter fully into this interesting subject as we should have liked, nor can we follow Mr. Russell through the exhaustive particulars of his remedy, but we give the salient points. He criticises the various so-called remedies, and calls attention to the fact that other cures, including Mr. Banting's, and the others alluded to above, do not profess to do more than temporarily reduce fat, whereas he aims to effect an absolute cure, which is a most important consideration; secondly, his mixture to be taken is simply a vegetable compound, containing no deleterious poison, and otherwise perfectly harmless. The medicine he describes as an agreeable, refreshing, and cooling anti-febrile invigorating tonic, which stimulates the digestive organs and contracts the muscular fibre of the stomach, and imparts vigour to the system, altering and improving the condition of the blood. It has no deleterious effect on the most delicate subject, promoting an invigorating and healthy action of the organs and developing muscular power. It is most agreeable and refreshing to drink, which is another great advantage, and it appears that many ladies now adopt this drink at the table as a sort of corpulent prophylactic. The average reduction of weight appears to be about 3 lb. or 4 lb. a week, but as much as 8 lb. has been lost in this time. He advises persons to commence his treatment, and rid themselves of the disease, and not to discontinue it after the first temporary reduction of fat. He gives also his scale by which one can see how much they are in excess of their normal weight, which appears to be very useful. We think that every person who suffers from obesity should communicate with him." The following is the table of weights alluded to above:—

A person	5 ft.	0 in.	height should weigh	8 st.	0 lb.
,,	5 ft.	1 in.	,, ,,	8 st.	8 lb.
,,	5 ft.	2 in.	,, ,,	9 st.	0 lb.
,,	5 ft.	3 in.	,, ,,	9 st.	7 lb.
,,	5 ft.	4 in.	,, ,,	9 st.	10 lb.
,,	5 ft.	5 in.	,, ,,	10 st.	2 lb.
,,	5 ft.	6 in.	,, ,,	10 st.	5 lb.
,,	5 ft.	7 in.	,, ,,	10 st.	8 lb.
,,	5 ft.	8 in.	,, ,,	11 st.	1 lb.
,,	5 ft.	9 in.	,, ,,	11 st.	8 lb.
,,	5 ft.	10 in.	,, ,,	12 st.	1 lb.
,,	5 ft.	11 in.	,, ,,	12 st.	6 lb.
,,	6 ft.	0 in.	,, ,,	12 st.	10 lb.

For the satisfaction of Stout Persons who may not be constitutionally robust, it should be mentioned that the medicine is a most invigorating Tonic, and being also agreeable to the taste, makes a capital drink when largely diluted.

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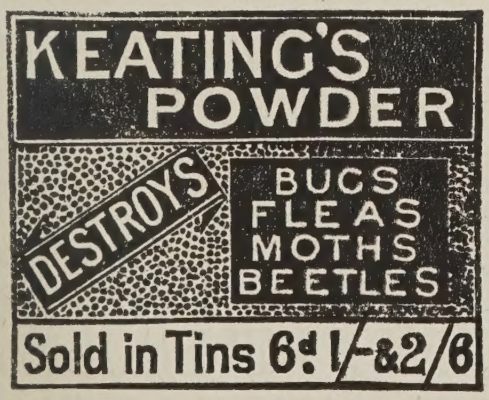

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